

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

*"Somewhere
Between Night
and Eternity."*

Red Darkness

by George
F. Worts

A Novel of Redemption

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NOVEMBER 18

BY THE
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I AM anxious to find men with desire to become draftsmen. With business picking up everywhere many thousands of draftsmen will be needed at salaries ranging from \$3000 to \$3600 per year.

In asking you to copy this sketch I believe I will be able to tell from the sketch you send in what kind of an opportunity you will have in this great profession.

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To every student enrolling now I give an opportunity of getting an \$80 drafting course absolutely without cost to him. So send in your sketch today and learn all about this offer.

FREE — Drafting Outfit

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXLVII

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NUMBER 2

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

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Red Darkness

By GEORGE F. WORTS

"I see two natures struggling within me—one base, the other blindly striving toward the light."

CHAPTER I.

THE TWO FACES.

THE lavender pall of a late tropical afternoon hung like dead smoke in the dreary repetition of pine hammocks and cypress swamps through which No. 33 had been steadily boring since early in the morning. A perspiring trainman drew aside the green curtain and poked in his head to announce languidly:

"Turpentine, gents; Turpentine."

Some one heaved a sigh. The big man

in the corner contemplated the wet end of his cigar critically; the Miami insurance agent mopped his long nose with a pink-bordered handkerchief; and the dark-skinned young man in gabardine methodically addressed himself to last-minute contingencies.

Jaca Javalie, as the dark-skinned young man in gabardine was known in remote art and musical circles, could not recall a last minute when there had not been contingencies. He could always depend upon them. Something always happened the last

minute, the last step, the last inch. Until an hour ago the horizon had been flawless; now a coarse and massive individual with a hard, red face and a pair of hard, suspicious eyes, bulked ominously upon it.

Jaca Javalie was relaxed in the black leather chair—the only chair the smoking compartment boasted—half listening with only one ear to the insurance man's monologue on Florida climate, industries, customs, personages, and—climate. The other ear, like a beetle's feeler, was attuned to random vibrations.

Javalie was irritably aware that the large, silent, red-faced man in the corner represented some branch of legal authority. A mirror over the nicked tooth-brushing basin had kept him informed that this man had been for the last forty hot miles watching him with the absorbed and expectant air of a cat watching a bird. It was most annoying.

The smoking compartment was blue with the fog of good fellowship. The insurance man, who sat in the favored seat, the one next the window, was doing his best to uphold the first law of Florida hospitality, which is to dispense information to the stranger within the gates.

He was dispensing information. He flitted from topic to topic—and from tropic to tropic—with the airy grace of a butterfly. And suddenly, without in the least being aware of it, he was flattered with the undivided attention of Javalie's other ear. He had been speaking of the kinds of people that Florida would be better off without—tin-can tourists at one pole, lawless and dissipated millionaires at the other.

"Now, take this man Banning, the ex-banker. We'll be passin' his place in a few minutes, just this side of Majolica. Looks like a castle—swellest place in this part of the State. Y' understand, I'm broad-minded and lib'ral in my views as any man, but those Bannings are a *bad* lot. He's one of these fellows who're doin' more harm than good to this State.

"Is he spendin' money? You bet he is! Chunks of it! But that ain't *everything*, y' understand. Of course we want folks to spend their money down here, but Florida's outgrowin' that stage. He's got a

house full of flippers and flappers and floppers, drinkin', gamblin', and I hate to think what else, night after *night*. It ain't *right*. That kind of doings just gives the State a black eye. We want decent, law-abidin' people down here—like yourself. Hotel man, aren't you?"

Javalie smiled faintly. "No; I play the organ."

The big man in the corner, upon whom lay the unmistakable imprint of the law's majesty, slowly spilled from full red lips a cascade of oily blue smoke. The smoke rolled down his shirt front, mounted in a veil through which his unblinking eyes peered meditatively.

Since he had boarded the Palm Beach Limited at Vero he had been studying the delicately modeled face of Java Javalie; had been plunged by the study into the deepest thought. No movement, no slightest gesture, of the young man had escaped him.

His mind was slowly revolving the queries, where? when? what? A blind game of mathematics—permutations and combinations. The sheriff of Bedloe County was exasperated, but he did not betray it. He had, like many another of Florida's officials, gone to an excellent school—the New York police force. A longing for equable climate—a place in the sun—had lured him to the land of golden beaches and cabbage palms, and here he had taken root. He was not an ordinary sheriff.

Where? When? What?

His mind was a rogues' gallery, but the dark face under observation was not filed there. This was not surprising. He had been away from New York for ten years. An organist, eh? Well, maybe!

The face of the young man in gabardine perplexed him. It was an interesting face, perhaps that of a religious zealot, perhaps that of a gifted crook. A slender, clever face of tanned olive, divided into equal halves by a slender, clever nose. Broad brows; a thin, cruel mouth. Rather an Irish face. Experience and suffering had written their signatures upon it and refined its angles.

Devil take the fellow, what was it? The sheriff expelled a small hurricane of smoke.

He had it now! Two faces! One from the arch of the nose up, the other from the arch of the nose down. Two faces. Two forces—a good one, and an evil one. The upper angelic, the lower a devil. It was an absorbing game.

Now—and it was for the first time since the sheriff had entered—Javalie took heed of him, turning his head as if he were magnetized by the very vitality of the sheriff's thinking. A flash of blue electricity from deep-set, penetrating eyes. Blue electricity. Holy smoke!

The sheriff instantly decided: "That lad works through the ladies." But he was doing Javalie a grave injustice when he thought that. Javalie worked through no one, man or woman. He was too clever. Professionally, women did not appeal to him. Their hearts were too big for their heads.

Javalie's lower face might have told the sheriff that. But he was done with analyzing. He had become the infinitely painstaking man of action.

Yawning, he stood up, indifferently sprinkling ashes down the front of his limp blue seersucker coat as he did so. His clothes fitted him like the skin on an elephant. Aimlessly he lurched into the corridor and cornered an amazed colored man.

"That feller in the gabardine suit," he grunted. "Dark complected; blue eyes; thin lips; black necktie; gray silk shirt. Got him?"

"Yas, suh!"

"What seat's he got?"

"Twelve, suh."

"Where's his ticket read?"

"Palm Beach, suh."

"Humph. I thought so; I thought so. Want you to keep your eye on that smokin' room. Got me? Keep your eye on *him*. If he makes to get up, push the button that rings this here indicator—twice, short and snappy. Got me, George?"

"Yas, suh. I knows you, suh. Yo's the—"

"Uhuh. Never mind me. Keep your eye on *him*. I got a dollar for you, mebbe."

Now, Jaca Javalie had, in the course of his somewhat varied experience, cultivated

a certain sense, not easy to define in a few words, and had refined it to an exquisite degree. It corresponded in a way to the delicately refined sense of Sheriff Judson which had enabled him to discover in Javalie's countenance, after long study, two forces—one with a latent capacity for good, and one with a latent capacity for evil—each conflicting with the other. It was a habit, if you will, of searching for the little, insignificant things that most men overlook.

Call it alertness, call it trained observation, call it anything you please; but the fact remains that within thirty seconds of the time when the Pullman porter entered the smoking compartment Javalie knew that something was happening. The porter was not behaving naturally; yet he was doing nothing but straightening the towels in the rack and fussing about the wash-bowls, as porters in smoking compartments have been fussing since time immemorial.

The Palm Beach Limited was whistling for Turpentine, losing momentum. And it was due in Majolica fourteen minutes later. Although his ticket entitled him to go as far as Palm Beach, Javalie had no intentions of going to Palm Beach.

He brushed past the porter into the corridor, and, as the green curtain fell behind him, the indicator rang twice—two jabs of a black thumb.

It was a code that Javalie understood instantly. When he reached seat No. 12 the sheriff of Bedloe County was drowsily staring out of the window from seat No. 11, across the aisle.

His black suit case had been moved—a glance assured Javalie of that. He unlocked and opened it and extracted therefrom a fresh package of cigarettes. Then he relocked it and started back toward the smoking compartment.

The sheriff of Bedloe County followed leisurely.

Javalie stopped at the drinking tank, flipped a paper cup out of the sanitary container, and flattened himself against the wall to permit the big man to pass. With a misty smile Sheriff Judson went by and entered the smoking compartment.

Javalie sipped the water slowly, crum-

pled the paper cup, and dropped it into the wire rack. He went to the doorway and looked in. The sheriff was washing his hands.

The train was stopping; the brakes were on. A double file of gummy kegs glided past the window. A gray structure with a tar-paper roof and a sagging ramp moved into view—a turpentine still. The building jerked. The train had stopped.

Now, Javalie detested, above all things, the rôle of low comedian. He was essentially a young man of unshakable dignity and reserve, and what the present circumstances demanded of him was singularly distasteful. He must, to insure his safety, perform an act that smacked of low comedy; there was nothing else to do. Within the coming hour he had important plans to execute.

After that hour had expired, any one was at liberty to watch him, to follow him; but until that hour *had* expired, he would tolerate no interference and no watching. And what he chose to term low comedy was his only salvation.

He dropped the heavy green curtain, returned to his seat, picked up the black suit case, and proceeded to the other end of the car.

The end of the station—a small, canary-colored building—was visible from the left side of the vestibule. Going south, all of the stations were on the left side. This side of the vestibule had been opened—the floor raised on its hinges and the door clamped back.

Javalie unlatched the platform on the right side, raised it, opened the door and clamped it back similarly. The vestibule could now be left or entered on either side. He descended on the left side, the station side, and walked briskly toward the end of the train.

Turpentine was in the heart of a pine forest. A drainage ditch half full of green water and choked with hyacinths ran through a concrete culvert under the tracks. It went under the tracks a few feet beyond the platform of the observation car.

When he reached the culvert Javalie looked back and saw Sheriff Judson in the

act of leaving the car he had left. He followed leisurely.

So far, excellent.

Javalie circled around the end of the observation car, and ran. There were a number of empty gondolas on the siding, and beyond them a cluster of canary-colored buildings. But he did not run toward any of these. He ran fleetly beside the observation car until he reached the vestibule he had a few seconds before opened for just this emergency.

He had hardly climbed aboard before No. 33 began moving. He had hardly concealed himself when the sheriff of Bedloe County shot around the end of the observation car and stopped, puffing, to glare at the line of empty gondolas and the scattered canary-colored buildings beyond.

Sheriff Judson was giving these buildings a thorough search when the Palm Beach Limited clicked around a curve and was lost to sight.

Jaca Javalie, seated on his black suit case in the vestibule, gravely wiped his dripping face with a silk handkerchief. He betrayed none of the delight or relief you would naturally have looked for at the ease, the simplicity, with which he had outwitted the crafty sheriff of Bedloe County. He was, in fact, still rather resentful, for he detested low comedy, and his sense of nicety had been offended.

CHAPTER II.

SACKCLOTH AND MYSTERY.

JACA JAVALIE detested anything that smacked of low comedy, not that he lacked a sense of humor, and not entirely because such parts offended his sense of nicety. The deeper reason was contained in the fact that Javalie was an artist, truly a great artist, not with paints or words or gestures—or with nitroglycerin and breast drills, as you many have erroneously suspected—but with ideas. It was artistry that had to do with the brain.

Given a set of facts and fancies that hung together, Javalie could produce the most brilliant, the most extraordinary effects. The brain of this distinguished-looking

young man approached, if it did not actually cross, the misty border line beyond which lies genius.

The sheriff of Bedloe County had called him clever. It was an insult. The sheriff had been nearer to guessing the riddle when he had discovered the two conflicting forces—the angel from the bridge of the nose up, the devil from the bridge of the nose down. Then the sheriff had suspected women in Javalie's electric blue eyes. It was women that had put the sheriff off the track. Women happened to be the sheriff's weakness. They solved most riddles; but they didn't solve Javalie's.

Even to himself it must be admitted that Javalie was a riddle; and the key, the nearest approach to a solution, lay between the angel and the devil. It had been a lifelong fight—the devil on the one hand, the angel on the other, fighting over the possession of Jaca Javalie. At times one was uppermost; at other times the other. A man with two conflicting souls, a good soul and a bad soul, is a battlefield scarred and desolated. Such a man is not to be envied.

Javalie did not move from the vestibule once the train left Turpentine. With the precious black suit case between his knees and the brim of his straw hat gripped firmly by the brown fingers of one muscular hand, he waited.

From time to time he leaned out, squinting his eyes against the rush of wind and smoke from the oil-burning locomotive, and peered into the distance.

An orange grove, laid out with the geometrical nicety of a parchesi board, fled past him, with ripening fruit shining in great clusters in the late afternoon sunlight. The air, when the exhaust from the locomotive was not carried down the wind to him, was sweet and languorous, refreshed now and then by vagrant puffs from the ocean which lay close by. Sometimes it was visible, a gleaming immensity of softest blue, like a sheet of enamel. The surf was hidden. There were no ships in sight. It was an empty ocean.

No. 33 whistled down a lane of thin pine trees, each trunk bearing a long white scar and a brilliant red-clay cup. Then came

rolling hills of yellow sand, studded with dry, wind-blown clumps of scrub palmetto. Javalie waited until the village of Majolica was in sight; then he tossed the suit case far out, clutched his hat in both hands, and jumped.

The next few seconds were confusing and painful. The Palm Beach Limited had not lost much headway when he flew from the platform into the candy bed of a dried ditch. Leaving trains at high speeds was one of the arts that he had never cultivated. Yet he jumped scientifically, with his legs almost straight out, relying upon his momentum to bring him upright.

His heels sank inches into powdery white sand. His knees instantly gave way, and he pitched forward heavily on hands and knees. He came dazedly to his feet, and discovered that his straw hat was in shreds. It had been carried under the wheels of the observation car.

The loss of the hat did not concern Javalie. It had served its purpose, and he was through with it. Its purpose had been to hide his hair. And now that no restraint was imposed upon it, his hair fell in a rippling chestnut mane almost to his shoulders. It was beautiful hair, thick and curling and fine of texture. It had taken Javalie more than a year to grow that splendid mane.

He shook it out, ran his fingers through it, and stared across the tracks toward the sea. He was still dizzy from the shock of his descent.

It was as though he had been deposited in some bewitched spot from a magic carpet, or as if he were dreaming a beautiful dream. The soft blue sea and late afternoon sky formed a background against which stood a Spanish air castle, a vision of lovely colors and exquisite grace; a castle of pinks and blues and milky white in a glorious garden. A low stone wall of palest rose inclosed the dream.

The roof was of deep-blue tile, a roof of lapis lazuli. Within the walls were the gardens. The flame of their blossoms was discernible even at this distance, and the castle was at least a quarter of a mile away. Javalie stared at the dream castle with delighted eyes. It was, indeed, a material

projection of some great dreamer's dream, and the artist in Javalie responded with a kind of ecstasy.

He drew his glowing eyes away from it directly, as if with reluctance. Recovering his suit case, he stepped over the tracks and entered the pine thicket beyond. In the center of the thicket he found a clearing, and disposed about the clearing like sentinels were four cabbage palm trees, worn and gray from the beating suns and the sand-laden winds of a hundred years. He was concealed here from observation in every direction.

He dropped the suit case and stood listening. Faintly there came to him from the west singing voices. Then all was still again. Javalie sat down on the suit case and unlaced his oxfords. With one shoe off he listened again. A dull, deep thudding pulsed through the air; there was a distant crackling.

Javalie waited, with the shoe in his hand, his eyes darting sharply to and fro. The throbbing of surf on the hard beach was resumed.

He undressed with haste, stripped to the skin. And if Sheriff Judson was studying Javalie then, which very fortunately for Javalie he was not, he would have been a greatly astonished man.

Before he removed the last of his clothing—a white silk union suit—Jaca Javalie was an ordinary young man with an unusual face. When he was undressed he was an extraordinary young man altogether. The skin of his body, like that of his face, was dusky satin. But that of itself was not noteworthy. In every gesture, every unconscious attitude, every line, Javalie was a beautiful specimen of manhood. He had the grace of perfect physical coordination. His shoulders, his arms, his slim waist were those of a fighter. His chest, shoulders and back were corded with muscles. They twisted and coiled when he moved. He might have been training for months to attain this condition.

As a matter of fact, he had been. His physical perfection, his muscular development, the glow of vitality under his skin, were due to months of the most rigorous training. His body was simply in harmony

with his brain. Javalie overlooked nothing. The clothing he had removed he folded and assembled into a neat pile. From the black suit case he removed a pair of white fiber sandals and two garments, both strange. One was a white cotton loin cloth; the other was a robe of sackcloth, roughly but strongly stitched. The sleeves reached to his elbows; the hem touched his insteps.

With the chestnut hair curling about his face and the gown falling about him loosely, a transformation was wrought. A divine sweetness had taken possession of that clever, ascetic face. The angel, you might say, had driven the devil out.

He examined himself in a little square hand-mirror. He smiled. His lips seemed to have lost their cruelty. It was the smile of a pure and beautiful soul, tranquil and serene. The eyes glowed with a mysterious and benevolent light.

Here, indeed, was a man from out of the ages, significantly familiar, yet elusive—a man whose beauty and purity of soul shone like a living flame in his countenance. Methodically Javalie packed his discarded clothing into the suit case, closed and locked it, scooped out a hole in the sand and buried it. The clearing would not be difficult to find again.

He walked out of the pine thicket and crossed the tracks. Proceeding slowly, he picked his way between bristling beds of Spanish bayonet toward the magnificent estate.

CHAPTER III.

THE GREAT VACATION.

THE house of Banning was a house of discord, a house divided against itself.

Once one forsook the brilliance and fragrance of sunlight and flowers for the cool, violet gloom of the great lower hall, one was, in some manner, made aware of this. There was a jarring note, elusive but there—a tension, a prickling uneasiness.

As six o'clock was tolled in the famous, carved-stone drawing-room, one would have been distinctly aware of reasons. Above the tinkle of a fountain the voice of a man and a girl sounded strident with displeas-

ure. One assumed that they were quarrelling. They were. From another quarter, if one listened sharply, could be heard the voice of another girl, plaintive. In yet another part of the Spanish air castle a deep, rich voice boomed wrath and profanity. A door slammed.

It was an extraordinary atmosphere.

In a splendid dining room of mahogany and amber sat the owner of the booming, wrathful voice—alone. And in keeping with the dignity of a tribal king, a patriarch, he sat at the head of the table. It was a refectory table, long and narrow, its beautiful, antique lines concealed beneath a covering of Irish linen. Two carved silver candlesticks upheld clusters of candles whose snowy purity contested with that of the cloth.

The table was set for five. Five cocktail glasses, coolly misted, each containing a stoned, ripe olive and a transparent topaz liquid; five assortments of glistening, heavy silver. A black man in a white uniform floated through the service door. The man at the table spoke to him. All five cocktail glasses trembled; so did the candle flames.

"What in the devil is the matter? Where is my son? My daughter? Mme. Jeanne? That—Mr. Reynolds?"

This is the voice of Theodore P. Banning, the richest retired banker in America. Let us consider him and judge him while the frightened butler flits about on his unhappy errand, that of bringing the errant sheep into the dining room.

An aristocratic gentleman of about fifty-five, with a ruddy, rather youthful and exceedingly stubborn face; an abundance of ivory-white hair brushed smoothly back; fiercely blue eyes under bristling tufts not yet ivory white; a correctly trimmed white mustache, *sans* points; a rigid, forceful mouth; a jaw to stand in awe of; an aristocratic and powerful man of fifty-five boiling with anger.

Fortune had lavished certain inalienable gifts upon Theodore P. Banning, as the business world of America had been compelled to realize when he was still a very, very young man. He had sprung from the most casual of Middle Western stock. He

was inexcusably powerful and dominating. Modern science provides us with a casual explanation of Theodore P. Banning and his kind. The secret of his early power, his apparently easy success, his later shark-like grip on the money market, lay in the fact that he was biologically unusual. He was not like ordinary men, any more than Napoleon or Alexander or Bismarck were like ordinary men.

Nature had endowed him with an inexhaustible stream of vitality; nature had endowed him with an extraordinary equipment of beautifully cooperating energy glands—adrenals, thyroids and pituitary. Great men are explained on that basis now. It is not a question of fate or luck; it is a question of ductless glands, of *hormones*.

At all events, Theodore P. Banning had poured out his amazing energy, year in and year out. Men said he never slept, and this was only a slight exaggeration. For thirty years he took no more than six hours of sleep in a night. Every morning of those thirty years he awoke refreshed and indomitable.

The greatest mistake he ever made was to retire. Aside from an occasional blinding but short-lived headache, he had never been ill in his life. He withdrew from business, sold out, at the age of fifty-three. Each of the years he had been on earth represented to him one million dollars. He explained that he had made enough, and that he wanted to enjoy his family.

His retirement was a signal for great rejoicing in many quarters. How many men were spared nervous breakdowns and financial desolation when T. P. Banning suddenly withdrew his heavy fist from the throttle of his juggernaut it would be impossible to estimate. There was rejoicing among another class of men as well. Among newspaper men Theodore P. Banning enjoyed the reputation of being the hardest man to interview in the financial district. His tremendous mind was not open to the public. Like other men who have enjoyed great power, he had little but contempt for the public. The average man was a sentimental fool. He was the daily victim of silly emotions. That was Theodore P. Banning's attitude toward the public, but he

was wise enough not to ventilate his private views.

When he retired he relented charmingly, however. He called the amazed newspaper men into his private office—a temple in which the clay feet of newspaper men had never but once before trod, and then during the panic—and in an interview which was published simultaneously the following day by every newspaper within reach of a telegraph wire he graciously told of his plans to live happily in the bosom of his family during the days that were left to him.

He confessed that he deserved happiness, for he had worked very hard. He even unbent to answer a question shot at him in regard to his formula for success, which every one of course wanted to know. It was his reply that "made" the interview. By this reply you will no doubt recognize the man, recall the interview. "My success is due wholly to a simple rule, which I have not once violated. It is: Get up one hour before the other fellow gets up, and go to bed one hour after the other fellow goes to bed."

Thus it was discovered that the mighty Banning never took more than six hours of sleep in a night—and never napped in the daytime. And this simple, homely rule on which the mighty Banning modestly based his success was freely commented on all over the world.

Foolish young men all over the world tried out the rule. Did they become in due course of time leaders of men and autocrats of finance? Of course not. But how were they to know that Banning, like Napoleon and Alexander and Bismarck and a few other of nature's darlings, was a biological freak—that a formula of success is a formula of success only when it meets one's individual requirements?

At all events, Banning retired, and sought in the bosom of his family the happiness he so justly deserved. What if his children happened to be perfect strangers to him? That could be easily remedied.

His wife was in England when the celebrated interview was published. She read it in the London *Times*, and wrote him a keen little note on stiff, creamy stationery which contained a coat of arms, in relief,

in the upper right-hand corner. She was no longer Mrs. Banning; she was Lady Northam now. Years ago, when the children were young, she had tired of his formula for success—after he had persisted in applying the formula to her own regimen—and secured a divorce and married Lord Northam, a man several years younger than herself, whose formula for success was quite the other way around—if he happened to have one, which is doubtful. The keen little note went the way of the other keen little notes which his wife, from time to time, addressed to him on family matters; and he entered upon the great vacation with a spirit that was nothing if not characteristic of him.

As one of the foremost among America's Aladdins, he caused to be erected in a breathless hurry two splendid temples to the architectural art—the Spanish air castle in Florida, and a French château at Southampton.

We come now to a trait in his character which is not so easy to understand, unless it be classified under greed, which was doubtless the dominating force of his career, the fire under the boiler, so to speak. This trait, as well as his own freakish revelation of it, is not uncommon among rich men. Very rich bankers are often addicted to the weakness of carrying upon their persons huge sums of money—more money than they could possibly find employment for under any contingency. Very rich men generally pay their bills twice or three times a year.

Carrying about such immense sums as they often do is foolish, obviously; and it is a confession of the greed which dominates them, which has made them what they are—rich bankers. Perhaps it is partly fear; perhaps it is analogous to the miser's despised habit of fingering, counting his gold, silver, and copper. To touch—to feel—to gloat over!

In a steel vault embedded in the concrete back wall of a windowless alcove adjoining Theodore P. Banning's bedroom were, literally, shelves full of money. Not stocks and bonds; these were efficiently looked after by a famous New York trust company. But money—currency; crisp new bills in

neat packs; hundred-dollar bills; five-hundred-dollar bills; thousand-dollar bills; cash; every cent of it legal tender, drawing no interest; beautiful green and yellow engravings.

That vault contained, one might say, Theodore P. Banning's art gallery. He *loved* money. Not for what it could buy, not because it represented the sweat of his brow, but for what it was. If he had any hobby at all, it was that of playing with his money. He loved to look at it; he loved to handle it; and it was safe. No thieves could break into that vault. The door and the walls were a foot thick. An electric or an oxyacetylene torch could cut through, perhaps—but in how many hours? A three-dial combination guarded its open sesame.

Unless one is well acquainted with the higher orders of greed, Mr. Banning's art gallery was a hard thing to understand in a man who was, in most other respects, so rational, so unimaginative. It was like biting into an apple and finding a worm. His only other weakness—and it is hardly fair to term it a weakness—was his very positive but very private belief in spirits. Not that he had the slightest desire to communicate with any of them, for he hadn't; the subject merely gratified a curious grain of mysticism which ran through his psychic fiber.

Upon his retirement it developed that there was another worm in the apple. He was determined to lead his children's lives for them. The tremendous flow of energy which had washed him to success and power must have an outlet. He had, while fighting for his millions, pictured himself in his twilight years in the rôle of indulgent father, gentle guide, and loving friend. And when the time came he found that his two children, Nan and Teddy, were perfect strangers to him, almost enemies—for they were members of an amazing new generation that he did not understand.

They declined to share any interests with him. They were willfully determined to include him in none of their affairs. Why should they? They had never done so before; why, simply because he had descended in their midst—like a strange airplane

out of the blue—should they *do* so now? When their attitude became clear to him he was shocked and offended. Was he not their father? Did they not owe to him every stitch on their backs, every morsel of food that went into their mouths, every dollar they squandered on their frivolities? Had he not slaved for them for thirty hard years? Was he not entitled to every atom of their affection, every hour of their time, every thought that passed through their heads?

He did not, of course, put this in words. He awaited impatiently the adjustment that time would make. Time went by and their aloofness did not diminish. He grew irritable and condemnatory. He fought with them. He threatened dire punishments. The breach widened—and he knew what it was to suffer agony. He had learned to know agony intimately when his wife left him for the gay Lord Northam; but this agony was worse. He suffered as only proud monarchs know how to suffer. He was enacting the leading rôle, as we intelligently have perceived, in the great family tragedy of America—a tragedy which is decidedly more American than European or Chinese.

Children must grow up and divorce themselves from the parent stock. That divorce is their passport to life. The present, highly criticized generation, more vehemently than any previous one, is demanding its passports.

Theodore P. Banning did not know that there was a new generation. He had fatuously believed all of these years that his children were simply his children. They were his! By God, they would remain his! For two years the house of Banning had been a house of discord, a house divided against itself.

It was a fight to the death.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. BANNING IN ACTION.

THE first member of his household to appear in answer to the tribal king's thrice-repeated summons was his daughter-in-law, Mme. Jeanne. She ap-

proached the table with the air of one who would not have been greatly astonished if one of the handsome silver candlesticks had been hurled at her. She sidled into the chair on Mr. Banning's left with the tragic meekness of an abused kitten.

The young lady had recently been crying. Her eyelids were reddened, her cheeks swollen. In all other respects, Mme. Jeanne was singularly attractive. Ringlets of glossy black hair were done up in a quaint and becoming manner on the top of her head.

She was a tiny thing, with beautiful slim legs and beautiful snow-white arms. Her mouth was so small that one wondered at times if it were really there. Mr. Banning used to refer to her jovially, at first, as "Teddy's watch charm." In all sentimental transactions he dealt extensively in time-honored bromides. Now, as he regarded the red eyelids and the swollen cheeks, his air was one of frank dislike.

"Where is my son?"

Mme. Jeanne and the five cocktail glasses shivered.

"Oh, *mon père, je—*"

"Don't talk that damned language in my presence!"

She stared at him hopelessly, her soft brown eyes melting, her little hands clutched in her lap. The tip of a tiny red tongue protruded momentarily. It always did when Mme. Jeanne was distraught; it was only a little, uncontrollable nervous gesture, not intended to be impudent.

"Don't stick your tongue out that way, please!"

"I am saw-r-ee."

"You have not answered my question."

"But Teddy ees sleeping."

Mr. Banning leaned forward, pushing the silver out of his way. His lower jaw protruded.

"Get him," he grated. "I don't care if he has to be carried to the table. I am sick and tired of this nonsense. Do you understand me?"

An event in the arched doorway provided a distraction. A confused impression of blue, pink and yellow momentarily prevailed as a girl flew, rather than ran, into the room, pursued by a laughing young man in white cricket cloth.

Nanette Banning had entered the tribal king's presence with her customary dignity and reserve. She was the girl whom, deep in his heart in the old, pre-vacation days, Mr. Banning had fatuously cherished as "the apple of my eye." He had once heard a doting father refer in such terms to a successful daughter, and Mr. Banning, lacking imagination, had made the phrase his own.

An impartial judge of the older school would have been hard put to decide whether or not Miss Banning could be called "successful." A jury of her peers would unquestionably have given her a rousing, unanimous acquittal; for she could smoke more cigarettes, drink more educated gin, dance longer, drive a car better, and hand out a snappier line than any of her near competitors. She had been described by her contemporaries, variously, as the cat's vest, the eel's elbow, and the bee's knee. Could praise be any higher?

The apple of Mr. Banning's kindling eye, to use a more discreet phrase, was a portrait of her mother at twenty-one, a radiant beauty. But Nanette possessed that which her mother had never possessed—fire. And it wasn't divine fire, either.

Blue-eyed, golden-haired, with the complexion of a Delaware peach, she had captured, somewhere along in her late 'teens, an irreverence of manner that provoked and exasperated her father beyond articulation. He had hoped to subdue her during the great vacation, but all of his crude and heavy-handed efforts had only seemed to make her worse.

She had absolutely no regard for his feelings. She was not the sweet, affectionate daughter of whom he had dreamed such pretty dreams—a daughter who would cuddle up on the arm of his chair of an evening and charmingly apply matches to his continually expiring invincibles. Where she got her lawlessness from was beyond him; certainly not from him.

Mr. Banning had changed his attitude only enough to look over at her when she flopped into her chair; the thunderstorm in his eyes had not diminished a particle.

"Where have you been all day, Nanette?"

Miss Banning lifted her eyes and sang sweetly, "Oh, Gloom, where is thy victor-ee?"

He snapped: "Answer my question!"

She bent forward, pushed the yellow hair out of her blue eyes, and mimicked her father's blood-curdling expression.

"In bed," she grated.

"You came in at seven this morning."

"Quarter of eight, dad; don't cheat me."

"Where were you?"

"Ha! Pete and I went fishing."

"Fishing!"

No italics can convey the shocked amazement and incredulity which Mr. Banning embodied in his gasp.

"Yes, dad—with an ivory-handled rake. But the fish got away with all our bait. We dropped—um—let's see—about three thousand. Oh, we had a slick time, didn't we, Pete? Most wonderful night. Moon; stars—"

Peter Reynolds's position in the Banning household was not an easy one to define. He was a gracious, well-mannered young man on the leeward side of forty—he claimed thirty-four—with thinning light-brown hair through which his scalp shone pinkly. He danced wonderfully. Nan had met him at a dance a month or so ago at the Royal Poincianna, and had forthwith acquired him.

In private conversations with his daughter Mr. Banning scornfully referred to their guest as "that damned beach comber." Yet he had nothing against Pete Reynolds except that Nan liked him and that he spoke French well enough to converse unintelligibly—to him—with Mme. Jeanne. Certainly—with the possible exception of Mme. Jeanne—he was the least troublesome member of the family. Pete was, in fact, the very soul of diplomacy.

"Was Ted with you?"

"Nope."

"He *wasn't*?" Mr. Banning now addressed fresh thunderclouds at the unhappy Jeanne. "Where was he, *madame*?"

"I do not know, my father."

"You do not know! You are his wife, and you do not know where your husband spent the night! My God! What time was it when he came in?"

"Eet was seex, p'raps seffen."

"Why weren't you with him?"

Nan snorted.

"Dad, for the love of Mike, let the poor child alone. Pick on somebody your size. Pick on me."

"I will attend to you in one moment. *Madame*, I told you to tell your husband to come down. Do you intend—"

But Mme. Jeanne, with a swish of silk, a twinkling of slim ankles, had bolted.

Mr. Banning, with a slow, convulsive movement of the shoulders, hunched the collar of his white linen coat a fraction of an inch upward. He deposited his elbows on the table and clasped his hands under his nose. Boards of directors had learned to squirm in their chairs when Mr. Banning did nothing but this. It corresponded to a slap across the cheek with a gauntlet; it meant, "Look to your steel!" When Theodore P. Banning planted his elbows on a table and clasped his hands under his nose, some one was going to be hurt. In the two years Nan had known him she had learned to interpret these signals correctly.

They did not frighten her in the least, and she had yet to be vanquished. Her father should have known that it is nothing but folly to carry battlefield tactics into the bosom of one's family. But Mr. Banning was a difficult man to teach; he much preferred to instruct others.

A clash now was inevitable. Nan, sipping her cocktail, contemplated him over the rim of the glass with luminous blue eyes. They were beautiful, provocative eyes. She put the glass down and fished for the olive with slim white fingers.

"Fire when ready, Gridley."

"I am going to tell you something," her father began firmly.

"Ah. You are sick and tired of my conduct."

He squinted, and when his eyes opened they seemed to flash.

"I am sick and tired of your conduct. This has been hanging in the air for days. I am going to settle it to-night—now! This is—the end!"

"Oh, dad, how dramatic! Do go on!"

"I want no more of your impertinence."

I have tried, for the past two years, to understand you. I have tried—"

"But, dad, you haven't, really. You have positively neglected me. You haven't courted me at all. The past two years have been nothing but a continued performance of, 'Nan, don't do this'; 'Nan, you mustn't do that'; 'Nan, I disapprove of her'; 'Nan, I think he's a common fortune hunter.'"

"And when you haven't been blacklisting my actions and my friends, you've been plunged in disgusting—perfectly disgusting—poker orgies. You haven't tried to understand me. You haven't tried to be nice. I don't think you have any cause to complain at all. Really, father."

But Mr. Banning was not to be sidetracked so easily.

"You were out all night."

"I admitted it. Pete will bear me out. We were playing a perfectly innocuous roulette system at Bradley's. It's a good system, even if it didn't work. You simply alternate on the—"

"All night," he repeated. "All night with a man I don't know from Adam's off ox. You say—"

Nan thumped the table with a clenched fist and sprang to her feet.

"I won't stand for that! If my own father is going to cast reflections—"

He managed a final interrogation:

"How do I know?"

But it left him wide open to a killing thrust, and he knew it.

She replied curtly: "You have my word!"

Of course, she had skillfully brought it around to that. Mr. Banning removed his elbows reluctantly from the table. One of the things one does not do, in questions involving honor, is to doubt one's daughter's word.

But Mr. Banning was not defeated; he was only outwitted. He was merely retiring to bring up fresh reinforcements.

Nan resumed her seat with sullen eyes and blazing cheeks. She sighed wearily. Her father had never, he was forced to admit, seen her so beautiful as she was now, radiant with emotions only partly expended.

When she was angry, indignant, as she was always after their little tilts, she blazed with a beauty that actually pained him—his heart. Why would she not learn that his reiterated don't's were his only way of conveying his love? He was not, he frequently told himself, a demonstrative man. Why would she not meet him halfway? He adored her. Was she blind to that? Did she really hate him? Why, then, was she so unkind?

He was still staring reproachfully at his cocktail glass when his son, trailed by poor, frightened Mme. Jeanne, entered the scene. Theodore P. Banning, Jr., did not come all the way into the dining room. He stopped in the doorway, with a purple dressing gown folded Indian style about him, a grotesque figure, with dark hair disheveled, eyes nearly closed and very murky, a face that might have been chalked. He glanced sulkily from Pete Reynolds to his sister, thence on to his father.

There was all but scarlet murder in his father's eyes.

Now, if Theodore P. Banning adored his daughter, he fairly worshiped the ground upon which his only son walked. Cast in his own image, eye for eye, bone for bone, sinew for sinew, he was something more than a chip of the old block. He lacked, it was true, his father's driving, dynamo-like energy, but he made up for it in other ways.

He was very quiet, very slow, very methodical, lacking entirely his sister's spontaneity. His anger was not easy to arouse, but when it was aroused it was dangerous. It burned steady and long; it didn't flare up and die out as did Nanette's. He thought things out, Teddy did. He was something of a dreamer, a philosopher; and, being a philosopher, he frequently sought solace in drink.

Loving his only son as he did, it was only natural that Mr. Banning should betray his tenderness constantly in his attitude toward him. His attitude, therefore, was one of constant abuse. He abused Teddy at every propitious opportunity; he tampered with his private affairs whether the opportunity was propitious or not.

A case in point was the late and not unlamented war. When the time came for us to participate Teddy was old enough to go—eighteen. He was a healthy specimen, well built, strong, and endowed with amazing powers of endurance. He was admirably fitted in all respects for service in the front-line trenches. He volunteered before the draft caught him. His father, who had not been consulted, merely gave a few casual suggestions to one of his secretaries.

Within two weeks Teddy discovered himself in the act of being transferred from an infantry training camp to a second lieutenantancy in a non-participating Washington bureau.

It took some time for Teddy to trace effects back to their causes. When he identified his father's fine Spencerian hand, as he presently did, he applied for leave, obtained it, and went to New York. He had been given time to think it over, and the more he thought the angrier he became.

In no uncertain terms he told his father not only what he thought of slackers, but of those custard-hearted beings who sat in the seats of the mighty and contributed to the delinquency of slackers. It was the first real clash they had had, and the father was too proud of his son and too ashamed of himself to do aught but yield. When next heard from Teddy was throwing hand grenades in Picardy and enjoying his leaves with the son of a Tonowanda, New York, dry goods merchant.

He returned in the spring of 1920 from occupied territory with a French bride, fed up with the soldier business, and eager to take part in the universal reconstruction program which was being discussed so largely by the newspapers about then. He was merely leaping, it proved, from the frying pan to the fire; for it was immediately after his return that Mr. Banning had decided to take the great vacation, to become the indulgent father, the gentle guide and the loving friend of his two handsome children.

His son, lounging white-cheeked and blue-lipped in the dining room doorway, after a night spent God knew how and with whom, was eloquent testimony to the

kind of success that had crowned his efforts.

Teddy said surlily:

"I am not hungry. I don't want anything to eat. All I want is sleep. I've got a headache, and I feel rotten. I wish you'd leave me alone."

His father glared at him a moment.

"Theodore, where were you last night?"

"Down the road."

"Drinking?"

"Certainly."

"Don't be impertinent."

A muttered, "Oh, Lord!" Distinctly,

"Yes, sir; drinking."

"What else?"

"What else? God knows."

"Were there women in the party?"

"I don't know. I don't remember."

"What do you remember?"

The boy straightened up, angry finally.

"What is the charge, father? Murder?"

"I want you to answer my questions civilly. I am sick and tired of your conduct. Leaving your wife alone here all night! Coming in after sunrise this morning, looking like some degenerate alley ruffian! I demand an explanation."

Teddy glanced at his sister, who snorted contemptuously; then back at his father with a weary sigh.

"There isn't any."

The insolence of the sigh was the last straw. His father lurched to his feet with knotty veins bulging out in his forehead. His complexion seemed to be turning black. His eyes bulged horribly. He brought his fist down on the table with a smash and shook with futile rage. Well, the explosion had come at last.

"You— You—" He shook his fist at his son; shook it again at his daughter. "My children!" He laughed wildly, mockingly. "My darling children! Look at you! An impertinent, shiftless vagabond and a drunkard for a son! A gin-drinking, cigarette-smoking, gambling she-devil for a daughter, who stays out all night with damned beach combers!"

Pete Reynolds ventured indignantly: "See here now! By Jove, I won't—"

Mr. Banning ignored him and backed through the doorway.

"So this is what I've slaved and driven myself for all my life! I tell you—I tell you, damn you, I wish you'd never been born!"

Nanette sang tauntingly as he vanished: "Gosh! Are we to be blamed for that, too?"

CHAPTER V.

HATRED'S UGLY LIGHT.

A BALMY, languorous breeze, fragrant and fresh from the Gulf Stream, greeted Mr. Banning when he strode furiously out of his house and upon the great southern veranda; a balmy, languorous breeze and the strangest apparition it had ever been his privilege to gaze on—a handsome, dark-skinned young man in a robe of brown burlap which reached almost to his toes; a slender, athletic young man with a flowing chestnut mane which reached almost to his shoulders, framing a countenance in which benevolence shone like a living flame.

He was smiling tranquilly, as if his thoughts were good, and his eyes were serene and humble. Mr. Banning drew in his breath swiftly and exhaled it with the words: "Good God! Where did you come from?"

The answer, in a voice as rich, as musical, as full, as an organ note, was as astonishing as the apparition: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness."

Mr. Banning continued to stare at him as if bewitched. Then shades of doubt and suspicion flickered over his eyes. He had cut his wisdom teeth in an environment where cranks were bluntly dealt with. He snapped: "Who are you?"

"My spirit is one that surpasseth all worldly understanding."

Mr. Banning waved an impatient hand up and down.

"That—that sack affair you're wearing," he said. "What's the idea? That's what I mean."

"The good in heart are simple," Javalie explained with a forgiving smile.

The banker scratched his head. What he could not understand, all other things

being understandable, was the expression in this queerly garbed young man's handsome dark face. He had never, except at a distance, beheld *bona-fide* holiness, and he strongly suspected that it was shining before him now.

"Humph. Well—uh—what can I do for you?"

"Nothing, my friend. I do not take; I give."

"Nothing." Mr. Banning surrendered unreservedly to amazement now. "Well, then, what—what—"

"I have been drawn here, I do not know why," the astonishing stranger assisted him in his full, rich, beautiful voice. "Such things are beyond my power to explain. There is trouble in this house; there is hatred. I do not know why I know, but it has been revealed to me."

"You are the master here? Ah, yes. You consider yourself a rich man? To be sure! Yet you are not. You are poorer by far than I—and all I have in the world is this coarse robe, these poor sandals. Did you not realize that the moment you saw me, my friend? You did not know why you knew, but you knew."

"Well, I'll—" Mr. Banning began in a strangled voice. "Well, I'll be—" he tried again; and again checked himself, although he was fairly blinking with bewilderment.

And because he omitted that perfectly natural "damned," Javalie knew that the most difficult step in the execution of his difficult and delicate program—the one that had worried him the most—had been triumphantly taken.

"See here, young man—" Mr. Banning was still struggling with worldly doubts on the one hand, and the silvery grain of mysticism which ran through his psychic fiber on the other.

He yielded, still struggling, to the latter. "Sit down. Sit down. What did you say brought you here?"

He had, as always when his interest was captivated, lighted one of his long, black Havana specials. Dragging a Singapore lounging chair close to the one he had settled himself in, he thumped on the arm of it imperatively.

The young man in the sackcloth garment

seemed not to have heard him. With a hand shading his eyes, he was gazing across the flaming banks of poinsettia and bougainvillea toward the sun, the sanguine crest of which was just visible above the pine thicket across the tracks.

His lips were moving, as if in silent prayer. For a half minute at least he was engaged thus, then he squatted on the floor and looked searchingly into the retired banker's flushed face.

Mr. Banning frowned and puffed.

"By Jove! What in the—what are you, young man—a sun worshiper?"

"Life goes into the west," Javalie replied very low.

Mr. Banning's frown darkened. "Are you a pilgrim?"

"A pilgrim? Of a sort, perhaps."

"What else? A healer? Do you lay on hands, or—"

He checked himself.

Javalie was gazing at him sternly, the lines about his mouth hardening.

"Do you question the power that lies within yourself? Do you question the source of the good that resides in one man, of the evil that dominates another? Why do you ask these empty questions? You say, 'Where do you come from? What can I do for you? What are you? What is your name?' I say, I come from everywhere—from the mountains, the deserts, the seas. I say I am the symbol of a power which heals the wounds of souls. You do not understand me? I say this is a house of hatred. It blazes out like an ugly light. That is why I am here. You cannot understand that I want nothing from you, but you will not turn me away.

"You do not believe me. You say, he is a beggar. You say, he is a thief. It is in your eyes. But your heart knows that your eyes are lying."

"Good Lord!" Mr. Banning declared. "Look here, my friend, forget what my eyes are saying; forget what my heart is thinking. Listen to me a moment. I have made a lifelong study of men's faces, and yours is a stranger to me. What you've said it's true! How you've come by that knowledge I don't pretend to understand. The nameless man from nowhere, eh? Come

into this house with me. I'll show you where that ugly light of hatred is coming from!"

Javalie followed. He did not misconstrue the motives which underlay Mr. Banning's eager invitation.

Mr. Banning looked upon him as a freak. He would be proud to exhibit such an unusual find. At the same time, Mr. Banning, who had all of his life dealt with hard, cold facts, had encountered, probably for the first time, a man who positively refused to deal with facts.

He was impressed even more than he realized.

CHAPTER VI.

JORDAN IS A HARD ROAD

FOLLOWING the tribal king's precipitate retirement, the dining room had been given over to warm discussion. Pete Reynolds had a solution at the tip of his ever-ready tongue. He remarked with a crushed air:

"I know what's wrong. I've worn the 'Welcome' off the mat. The row started over me—Adam's off ox, *alias* the damned beach comber. It will clear the ozone if I fold my tent like the Arabs. I will fold tomorrow."

Nan Banning turned on him tigerishly. "Pete Reynolds, you'll do nothing of the kind. You don't figure in this at all. Dad is simply wild at the way Ted's been cutting up; he takes it out on the guilty and innocent alike. And I don't blame him."

Her brother glided swiftly across the room, fumbling at the hem of his purple dressing gown. He slipped into his father's chair, sagged over the table, and peered leeringly into his sister's flushed face.

"The hell you say! I'd like to know when you were elected to sit in judgment on the things I do. You give me a pain. All of you give me a pain. If he isn't ragging me, you're pulling some of your cold storage sarcasm. And when it isn't you, Jeanne is whimpering about the way—"

Jeanne, forlorn, wet-eyed, all but forgotten in the doorway, whimperingly protested, "*Mon cher, tu n'as pas—*"

He spat at her, "*Tai toi! Venez ici! Asseyez vous!* We are going to settle this now—who's who and what's what!"

Mme. Jeanne crept to the table and slunk into her chair with bowed head and tremulous throat.

Nan reached over suddenly and patted her brother's hand.

"Now, Ted, just hold your prancing stallions a minute and listen to what I have to offer. Leave Jeanne out of it. We know you made a mistake when you married her, but that's something to settle some other time.

"What we've got to face is the big mistake we came home from the war to. We're neither of us fitted to earn our own living, and if this feud goes much further our worshiped parent is going to turn us out in the most approved movie style. It's in the air, as he said. We're in for it. Let's face the facts.

"Now, here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to tell that high-handed monarch exactly what I think of him. Then— Listen, Ted. Pete wants to marry me. At least, he admits it under sufficient stimulation, when sufficiently pressed. It's up to Pete. My notion is that we simply ought to beat it. Father will cut me off without cigarette money. Let him, damn it. I'm tired of jazz, anyhow. Pete's poor as blazes, but we're both young. We're not afraid."

"I don't believe," Pete put in sagaciously, "that we should do anything so—well, so rash, to-night. Wait until after the party, anyhow."

Nan shifted her attention to him, gazed at him with hard, speculative young eyes. "What do you mean by that, Pete?" she asked softly.

Her brother sneered.

"I'll tell you what he means by that," he drawled. "He means he's yellow. He means he's nothing but a rotten he-gold-digger—that's what he means!"

Nan shrieked.

Pete Reynolds had flung one arm across her face as he grasped a handful of Teddy's hair. With the other he was preparing to strike.

Mme. Jeanne was pressing a bouillon spoon hysterically to her breast.

The tableau had progressed thus far when Mr. Banning and Javalie entered.

"Here, my friend," the banker cried gloatingly, "is the source of that ugly light of hatred! Mr. Reynolds, kindly resume your seat. Theodore, will you oblige me by taking your customary place? I wish to introduce to you a gentleman from afar—a gentleman without a name, whose philosophy may entertain you. The keynote he strikes, as you will observe, is extreme simplicity."

Mr. Banning flashed an ironical smile about the table.

The light from the northern window had dimmed. The candle flames flickered at the tops of their long, virtuously white stems, and glowed pallidly upon surprised faces. Teddy, suddenly relaxed, was grinning. Nan's smile was like that of Mona Lisa's, there and still not there. Jeanne was staring, with mouth agape, as though the tall, shadowy figure in the sackcloth robe might have been a vision, or a specter, perhaps. The candlelight invested Javalie with an air of mysticism, almost of unearthliness, which the glow of sunset had only suggested. It softened the lines of his mouth and jaw; it deepened his eyes and heightened their mystery.

Pete Reynolds was studying him through suddenly narrowed eyes; and it was upon Reynolds that Javalie bestowed his longest glance.

He was not smiling. He advanced to the foot of the table, and there he stopped, with his hands clasped behind him and an expression of wonderment upon his face. The spell was broken by the entrance of the colored butler, who halted and gazed with blinking eyes at the apparition.

He was brought to earth by Mr. Banning.

"Don't stand there like a gibbering idiot. A chair for this gentleman."

Javalie said gravely: "I do not use a chair."

This was greeted by a moment of uncertain silence, then a chorus of laughter. The negro retired in a daze.

"Won't you have a drink, Mr.—Mr. Gentleman Without a Name? This hasn't been touched."

Nan pushed her brother's cocktail glass toward him without moving her eyes from his.

Javalie met her slightly mischievous gaze with one of tranquil benevolence. She seemed to become aware then, for the first time, that his face was made up of integral parts. She relinquished the cocktail, withdrew her hand, and candidly stared at him. Then she shifted her eyes quickly to her father, who, in Javalie's own attitude, with arms behind him, was staring triumphantly down at her.

"Well, Nan?"

"Dad, what does this mean?"

"I don't know, Nan. The young man is a stranger to me."

"At all events," Pete Reynolds murmured dryly, "he does not look upon the gin when it is synthetic."

Nan shrugged her shoulder nearest Pete to enjoin silence, and addressed the mystery man directly.

"Do you mean you're not going to tell us who you are—or where you've come from?" she said softly.

Teddy was leaning forward with drooping lids and a twisted grin. "How was everybody up on Mars when you left?"

Nan was no longer smiling. The same ineffable thing in the stranger's dark, handsome face that her father had described, for lack of a better name, as holiness, was making its appeal to her. Something in his deep-set, penetrating eyes, in the expression about his serene mouth, sobered her. It was one of the most interesting faces she had ever seen, and, with the mellow light of the candles playing upon it, it reminded her of some one. Her brain raced back to an afternoon in Paris—a stroll through the Louvre—a portrait of Ignatius of Loyola!

"You're a Jesuit!" she cried.

"Nor a Franciscan, nor a Trappist," Javalie said gravely. "But a stumbler along the blind trail that we call life. You ask me questions that I cannot answer. I came to this house without knowing why—"

"Hold on, young man!" Mr. Banning stopped him. "You came to this house because you saw a bright and ugly light!"

No one but Nan took this seriously. "A bright and ugly light?"

"Hatred," said her father kindly.

"A fanatic," Reynolds muttered.

Javalie regarded him thoughtfully and, it seemed, with a measure of relief.

"I am what I seem to be. That is what we all are. We live, and so we are. We are written in plain letters for the others to read."

"Holy man," Nan inquired solemnly, "can you read me? Or is the writing simply unpublishable?"

He gravely answered: "The writing, as it is written by your own acts, is distressingly vivid."

There was a mild explosion from Mr. Banning.

"I knew it! The man is a genius. 'Distressingly vivid!' Isn't it perfect? I've hunted for that phrase for the past two years. And this young lady—my daughter-in-law?"

"A bleeding heart."

"Oh, juniper!" exclaimed Teddy.

His father glared at him. "This young man knows what he is talking about, Theodore. How—how about me—uh—holy man?"

"Cold steel."

"Here, now! Here, that isn't—"

"Perfect!" Nan cried. "And this gentleman—Mr. Reynolds?"

"Sifting sand."

Every one laughed but Reynolds, who scowled.

"Gorgeous!" agreed Nan. "And my brother—"

"Red darkness."

"Perfectly slick!"

"What do you mean by that?" Mr. Banning demanded.

"You have asked for symbols," Javalie replied. "I do not try to interpret them—so soon."

"Do you read palms, too, holy man?" Nan inquired innocently.

He gazed at her as he had done before, with that wondering, serene gaze, which seemed to penetrate to the very core of her.

She resisted it as long as she could, and her eyes suddenly dropped. It was the first

time in memory that a man had been able to make her do that.

It was confusing, but she glanced up sparkingly.

"How long would it take you to interpret our symbols?"

Javalie's head moved vaguely.

"Stay until you've done it!" Mr. Banning exclaimed.

Nan added hurriedly: "Of course you'll stay, won't you? We'd love to have you."

"Of course he'll stay!"

"Stick around, old trouser," Teddy urged him huskily. "If you think you saw an ugly light, wait until you've been in this happy household a day or two. Huh! Wait until the shindig starts to-night."

"Duty has called me here," Javalie admitted quietly. "Yes, I'll stay."

The negro had returned with bouillon cups and dishes of salted wafers. Javalie, at his appearance, had turned gracefully to the west. With one hand at his forehead, his lips moved rapidly, as if in prayer. The silence was, except for the remote rumbling of the surf, absolute while he performed this rite.

No one was smiling now but the banker, and his was the unchanged smile of triumph with which he had inducted his find into the bosom of his family.

When Javalie turned back to the table, his host asked gayly: "Do you eat all of your meals buffet style?"

"I must stand while eating. Food is no less a gift from Heaven than the light from the sun and the stars." He smiled tenderly. "It is one of my beliefs."

"Your own personal belief?" Nan wanted to know.

He nodded.

"You mean, you don't belong to any sect?"

"To none that I know of."

"Are you—proselyting?"

He smiled again. "Perhaps I am in error. No; I cannot take that responsibility. I have seen no visions. I am not a St. Ignatius. How and why my beliefs are inspired—I know not. I have stumbled, I have fallen, but—I have risen to my feet again." His wonderful eyes glowed with religious fervor.

"And you believe you've got to stand while eating?"

"Yes, my friend."

Mr. Banning nodded amiably. "Do just as you please. It is the law of this household. Every one does as he pleases and answers to no one. You'll have soup?"

"I do not touch food that is desecrated by fire."

"What! Well, well; pardon me, my boy, but you don't look it. You look like a meat eater to me."

He and his daughter exchanged glances and smiles. They were the first friendly smiles they had exchanged in goodness knows how many weeks.

Javalie had intercepted them. His program was proceeding, if not precisely according to schedule, at least on a satisfactorily parallel course. He was accepted, as wandering minstrels were accepted by the feudal barons of medieval times. But he was accepted.

He watched Mr. Banning eat. Mr. Banning, like all active, aggressive men, was a hearty eater. He enjoyed good food, and he ate quantities of it.

Javalie delicately devoured two apples, a sliced tomato, and a small dishful of walnut kernels. Mr. Banning ate fresh shrimp salad, three thick, juicy slices of red roast beef and five large baked potatoes, as well as other foods which had been desecrated by fire.

Javalie had had only a light luncheon. He was very hungry. The sight of Mr. Banning enjoying his food was almost painful to him. Mr. Banning had hewn close to the line when he had guessed Javalie to be a meat eater. Javalie loved rare roast beef. Before the meal was finished his appearance was more that of a mystic than it had been when the meal began. Jordan is a hard road.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MOON ROOM.

MR. BANNING had a number of fixed habits. One of these was to sit down to dinner punctually at six. Another old and unshakable habit was to

take his after-dinner liqueur in the dining room. He sipped with deep enjoyment one ounce of Napoleon brandy. It was a ritual he had observed for twenty years. He claimed it aided digestion and materially shortened the evening.

Javalie appreciated good brandy; he was also fond of frapped *crème de menthe*, colorless, which the others drank. But he allowed himself nothing more stimulating than distilled water.

When the brandy ritual was concluded Mr. Banning took him up to a guest room. "You have probably walked a good many miles to-day, young man."

"What is distance?" Javalie smiled.

"I know—I know; but you probably won't feel any the worse for a good shower or a tub. We're having a little party here to-night, and you must not miss it. My parties are generally very interesting events. You will no doubt be shocked. I want you to be shocked. It will make explanations easier. H-m. I suppose you don't sleep on a bed, do you?"

"The hard ground, with only the stars for a canopy, has been my couch for many years."

Mr. Banning's lips twirled, but he controlled them in time.

"Well, a good many of us would be better off if we followed your example. Now, that Buddhist prayer rug over there—that really ought to be as comfortable as the ground, don't you think? Or do things woven by the heathen—"

"The Buddha of Kapilivastu was a man after my own kind, my friend—an earnest seeker after the truth."

The banker rubbed thoughtful fingers over his crisp white mustache.

"I—I suppose so. Young man, it seems to me you've got some pretty fine ideas tucked away in the back of that good-looking head of yours. What you said downstairs about my children struck deep—struck very deep. Red darkness! Now, that—that did perplex me. Red darkness. That really troubles me, young man. Do you suppose—I mean—Red darkness. Just what did you mean by that?"

"Your son," Javalie replied sadly, "is trembling at the brink of a bottomless pit.

Red darkness surrounds him. The world in which he lives is always plunged in night, A soul struck blind."

Mr. Banning was frowning attentively. "I can't quite understand all of that, but I don't say there isn't sense to it. The ugly light of hatred! That's where you hit the nail on the head!

"Young man— H-m. You don't sit down, do you? Well, I can say it standing up in just as few words. For the first time in two years I actually enjoyed my dinner to-night with my family. You have brought something into this house. I don't know what it is. You—you drew us together, in a way. We laughed together. Now, don't take that as an offense. What I mean to say is, your presence has somehow taken off a dreadful strain.

"Don't take it into your head to leave in a hurry—that's what I wanted to say. Stay here. I'll make it worth your while. There's mighty little I wouldn't do for a man who straightened out this family snarl of mine."

Javalie lifted his hands and slowly let them fall. He shook his head sorrowfully.

"Why is it that you reduce all humanity, all life, into the two cruel words, deliver and pay? Money! What can I do with money? Will it make me any happier?"

Mr. Banning nodded guiltily. "I spoke hastily, I see. I did not mean to offend you. Simply wanted to give you some—uh—idea of my earnestness, my anxiety to have you stay. You're not apt to take it into your head to—to go on—are you? I can't tell you how anxious I am to have you here. Could you give me some assurance?"

Javalie replied in a voice that was little less than a blessing: "I will stay, if you so desire it, my friend, until I have finished."

When Mr. Banning was gone Javalie locked the door and sank into a chair with a sigh of utter exhaustion. He had rehearsed the scene with the Banning family every day for the past three months, standing before a mirror, practicing his serene and benevolent smile; yet, in spite of the smoothness with which it had gone through, he was trembling in every nerve. And wa-

ters even more ticklish lay ahead. He studied the room with critical approval. It was done in warm grays with an undertone of Chinese blue. Gray walls, gray hangings, gray furniture, gray-and-blue rugs. Dared he sleep in that wonderful bed? No. A bed with fresh linen once occupied was altered in a thousand respects.

He stretched out his arms, yawned, and grinned. Then he sobered. According to the architect's plans, which he had secured and studied until he knew the house of Banning by heart, the banker's bedroom should be two doors from his own. He would have preferred an adjoining bedroom, but no matter; it was enough that he had the freedom of the house.

He went over to one of the windows and gazed through fine-mesh copper into the dusk. A patch of the afternoon sky still lingered in the east, a blue ground on which were piled massive, cubical clouds stained saffron, the kind of solid-looking clouds that Howard Pyle loved to paint in all their soft brilliance.

From his window to the dim white beach stretched the famous garden. He saw trelises half hidden by red-gold begonias, drooping bugle-shaped clusters across the latticed squares; rows of flame-red poinsettias, their star-shaped blossoms stiffly erect; long, low walls where cloth-of-gold roses clung and drooped; two columns of stately royal palms with silvery green trunks marching down to the sea.

Two years ago this garden had been a tract of scrub palmetto, hyacinth and bunch grass. The land had been cleared and filled. Royal palms had been shipped to Majolica from the Royal Palm Hammock, south of the Everglades; vines and shrubs and plants in full flower had been transplanted. Well, money was a magic wand; and Aladdin was an amateur.

Javalie knelt down with his elbows on the sill and gazed out over the garden to the vastness of purple water. Far at sea the lone light of a steamer twinkled like a star. A freighter from South America, perhaps, or the West Indies. No—more than likely a whisky runner from the Bahamas!

He sprang up, slipped off the robe and loin cloth, and strode into the bathroom.

This was a magnificent establishment. Walls, floor and ceiling were composed of nicely mitered slabs of white marble. There was a sunken tub along one wall long enough and deep enough, almost, for a swim. There were mirrors and sprays, silver-plated knobs and fittings—a bathroom grand enough for a prince.

With his hands on his lean, brown hips, the adventurer took this grandeur in with a smile that was almost wistful. He appreciated artistry, and here was a masterpiece of the plumber's art. Perhaps, if he played his hand with the proper finesse, he might some day in a house of his own sport a bathroom as elegant as this!

He filled the tub extravagantly to the brim with cool water as blue as ice, slipped in, and floated. It was salt water. Luxury! With his body floating as if on air, his mind was free to roam. He closed his eyes reflectively; he thought most clearly when he lay floating in water.

Theodore P. Banning? . . . Yes; hook, line and sinker. That crafty business monarch was applying a rule with which he had made more than one of his millions in his busy Wall Street days—surrendering a technical problem to a specialist, an expert. He had jumped nimbly to the conclusion which Javalie had carefully planned that he would jump to—firmly believed that Javalie specialized in pouring oil on troubled waters. The trace, the more than a trace, of mysticism in the banker's psychic make-up, on which Javalie had based his expectations, had responded beautifully. Pigeonholes for the others.

Miss Banning? . . . Sharp, sophisticated, hard, mischievous. Would probably make a determined attempt to undermine with flirtation; the most natural outlet for her peculiar type of egotism. Possibly neurotic.

The son? . . . Ponderously ill-humored. Seething under constraint. A possible quarrel here. *Positively* neurotic.

The tiny, dark-haired daughter-in-law? . . . Would come to him weeping, immediately after weeping, or prepared to weep. Pining away for sympathy and understanding. Would confess that they were killing her.

Confessions, Javalie hoped, would be forthcoming in abundance. His data was by no means complete.

The fellow with the thinning hair? . . . Trouble! There had been a clash when their eyes met. A schemer. Dangerous.

Javalie rubbed himself down with a luxurious towel; inspected a blue pint bottle in an embedded medicine cabinet. "Alcohol; for external use only. If taken internally will cause serious gastric disturbances." He replaced it with a grimace; then he resumed his loin cloth, sandals and sackcloth, and slipped out into the hall.

The distant tinkling melody of a fountain again attracted him. It should be situated, according to the architect's final plans, in the center of the house, the Moon Room, which was a glassed-over modification of the *patio* of the Moorish hacienda after which the house had been patterned. Every fiber of Javalie's appreciative artistic being hungered for the Moon Room.

At the second door from his own, however, he paused a moment. Like his own, it was a solid-looking door of some dark wood, probably walnut, with a heavy burnished bronze knob.

He saw, in a perfectly clear and detailed mental picture, the closets, the battery of windows, the door at the upper left which gave upon a windowless alcove whose principal feature was a vault door of gray steel as tall as a tall man, as thick as the upper armor of a battleship, as impenetrable as the mind of a German diplomat. A job for a small army of cracksmen equipped with a small factory of apparatus. Could he, unaided, cause that massive hinge to swing? His artistic brown fingers twitched. With pulses slightly accelerated, he passed on, and turned to the left into another high-ceilinged hall. He slipped through the gloom on a deep carpet with the grace and stealth of a prowling cat.

A passionlessly cool blue glow sank into the hall from space beyond. The hall ended upon a wide balcony, and here Javalie stopped with hands knotted behind him. The architect's description of the Moon Room had formed the nucleus of Javalie's desire to visit the Bannings. In reality it was bewitching.

Fairyland at night! The tropics in the moonlight! Those must have been the impressions the artist who had designed the Moon Room had striven to convey. Huge globes of some dark metal, punctured with thousands of tiny, ragged holes, hung down from the lofty arch of the glass roof. They twisted and turned in vagrant currents of air, as if swimming in ether. Brilliant tungstens in the centers sparkled through the punctures like myriads of stars in a blazing midnight sky.

Other lights, concealed, stained the air of the Moon Room blue—the blueness of a Grenada night. The sensuous flavor of imported tropical flowers—the tuba rose, narcissus, maid o' the night, and chain of love—rose in cloying volume from beds of gleaming dark leaves. In the center of a blue-tiled floor a fountain played, catching glints from the counterfeit starlight and shining like sprays of diamonds, tinkling as they fell.

Moonlight in a tropical garden! A dream of Grenada! The artist in Javalie responded with a thrill of irrepressible ecstasy. It was a complete thing, a masterpiece. To think that the mere expenditure of money could paint a picture so beautiful! Teeth gleamed whitely in the darkness to the left of him; two tiers of them. A French organ.

Javalie had lightly, but with his accustomed dignity, informed the Miami insurance man on the Palm Beach Limited that he played the organ. He did. He had, with especial permission, played the great organ in St. Peter's in Rome; he had tried the organ in the egg-shaped Mormon tabernacle in Salt Lake City, with its choral stops purer and sweeter than the voice of a boy soprano.

He slipped into the curved seat, examined the stops and searched in likely places for an electric switch controlling the bellows motor. He found it and ran his fingers tentatively over the upper register.

Bach's "Passacaglia" was one of Javalie's favorites. There is, toward the climax, a pause on a chord of four notes; one low in the bass, two forming a major third in the middle, and one high in the treble. Some players fill in every concordant note

within reach of both hands; Javalie considered the effect of Bach's four notes superior.

To him the resonant chord mingled and harmonized with the blue ether surrounding him. It completed, rounded out, a glorious impression. He played the climax through again, his feelings swept away on a flood

of exquisitely blended color and sound and fragrance.

He was unable to go on. He turned from the organ with tears glittering in his eyes. Then he became aware that some one was standing beside him.

The spirit and the flesh! A moth in the moonlight! It was Mme. Jeanne.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

THE OLD HOME

THE old home I was born in,
The homestead 'mid the trees,
Comes stealing back across the years
Like murmurs on the breeze,
And yet there are no raptures,
Such as the poets sing,
In all the host of memories
The olden dreamings bring.

In winter or in summer
On the homestead that I knew,
Though clear the day or rainy,
There were endless tasks to do,
And though we labored hugely
From dawn to setting sun,
It seemed to me, a dreaming lad,
My work was never done.

The chores I did were legion:
I threw hay from the mows,
I curried countless horses,
I milked a drove of cows,
And when the day was over,
To keep my thoughts from sin,
I filled the pails with water
And lugged the stove-wood in.

My tasks done, in the winter
I climbed the drafty stairs
Into an arctic bedroom
To shiver through my prayers;
But during all the summer
This room of mine would be
As hot as—well, the regions
Which good souls never see.

Let others hymn the glories
Of the old home 'mid the trees;
Now I have a shower-bath
To use when I darn please;
Now I have a comfy flat,
And from my easy-chair
I laugh at the old homestead
And rejoice that I'm not there.

Edgar Daniel Kramer.



Out of the Coral Sea

By S. GORDON GURWIT

Author of "The Necklace of Heaven."

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

THE FATES' VICTIM.

FIRST, I want to affirm positively that the Greeks made a huge error when they paraded Zeus as the lord of the wide heavens; they should have placed the real rulers there—Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos—for the inscrutable fates rule both the heavens and the earth.

If you doubt that romance and adventure still exist in real life—go live among the islands of the South Seas for a while!

If the capricious fates had not dabbled, how could Bob Carter, walking the streets of his home city, have had his destinies tied up with a little island in the Coral Sea? And why did Moy Song, who lived in distant Macao, take a photograph from a dead man's hands?

Perhaps you'd better read my story. It has often been said that truth is stranger than fiction. It is. When truth ventures into the realms of melodrama, it beggars description. This is one case in point.

When Bob Carter returned from France he wore a captain's uniform. He also wore a medal, bestowed in the name of France, because, in his quiet way, he was something of a fire eater.

You would probably have suspected something of this because of his appearance. Tall, broad of shoulder, deep of chest, narrow-hipped, he walked with the natural grace of an Arab. Easy-going, worldly wise, blessed with a serene insouciance, he was much addicted to taking most things passively. You would have called him lazy—but with the Italian laziness, as of a leopard

who sleeps in the sun. There was promise of leonine strength in his suppleness, and the Raphaelesque head was set strongly upon his shoulders.

Beneath this suave exterior, however, there was a vague, restless impulse, a lurking instinct that answered to the call of war, that thrilled toward fiery perils and the nervous excitement of stirring events.

A recent graduate of a famous university, he had been helping his father in the latter's modest brokerage office. The first day war was declared he joined the army. His father had wrung his hand in silent approbation and had hobbled down to camp to see him march away.

He returned to his native shores to find that his father had been dead for six months; that instead of a modest inheritance, there was nothing but a few debts. As his mother had died during his childhood he was quite alone, except for a maiden aunt, somewhere in the West, whom he hadn't seen for years.

When he was mustered out he set out for the first time in his life to find a position. But a college graduate with no vocation didn't seem to fit in anywhere. Did he know "credits"? Could he keep a double entry set of books or take dictation and run a typewriter? No! Did he know filing or exports or advertising? No? Well, they were sorry. They needed some one with specific experience. If he'd leave his name and address and anything turned up, they'd let him know.

Closely hoarded, his pay lasted for several months. Then came a day when he realized that his condition was becoming hazardous. He moved to the cheapest boarding house he could find, on a West Side, uptown street; he practiced every economy possible; he sold surplus clothes and possessions to furnish himself with additional capital to withstand his involuntary siege of idleness, and he sought avidly for some sort of work.

But the fates had decreed otherwise. He did not find any. And at length there came a day when he walked the streets, going to his room, with his last few pennies in his pocket, bitter, morose, desperate, shabby, wondering if it paid to continue his apparently impotent assaults to obtain a position.

Every one, seemingly, had already forgotten that there had been a war, or that any debt of gratitude was owed to the defenders of the nation. America had gone back to business. It couldn't be bothered with untrained ex-soldiers.

Meditating gloomily he turned into the avenue to go home. Suddenly he was thrown to the pavement by the furious, concerted rush of several men who had turned the corner at a run.

A volley of vivid oaths greeted him. The men sprang into a waiting automobile; there was a loud staccato thunder from the exhaust and the car darted ahead, turned a corner, and was gone from sight. It all happened in less time than it takes to tell it here.

Following swiftly came a crowd of shouting people who ebbed and flowed about Bob, gesticulating, excited, and—miraculously enough—a policeman.

"There's one of 'em!" shouted several boys in the crowd, pointing to Bob, who eyed them all in startled bewilderment.

Gradually he gathered from the excited comment that a robbery had been attempted and had failed, that some one had been shot. It slowly came to him that he was being pointed out as one of the thieves!

The bluecoat laid a heavy hand on his shoulder while he swiftly searched Bob's pockets to see if he was armed. No suspicious or menacing protrusion was evident. The officer tightened his grip.

"Come along with me!" he growled. "Clear the way!"—this to the jabbering, encircling crowd—"get out of the way! I've got to get to that box to ring up the wagon."

The crowd was excited. It had nearly witnessed a robbery—and perhaps a murder—and it wanted a victim. Bob, shabby in his seedy suit and cap, stared, while a natural resentment began to ferment within him.

"I'll go with you," he said to the policeman. "There's no need to pull me around this way. Take your hands off! I'll not run away. You've made a mistake—"

"That's one of 'em!" shouted a boy. "I saw him! He fell while he was running and the others left him!"

"Mistake, nothin'!" answered the officer, tightening his grip. "You can tell it to the judge! And don't make any funny breaks if you know what's good for you!"

Bob's heart began to pound with a fierce sense of outrage. He noted the growing crowd, the pointing fingers—the lust of the mob for a victim. He saw that his appearance was against him, and he foresaw that his desperate financial straits would come to light and forge a plausible link that might connect him with anything desperate.

"I tell you to take your hands off!" he said again, his voice low and fierce, while a great shame burned upon his cheeks. "You've made an error, officer. I'll go with you and explain whatever may be necessary. I was just turning the corner when those fellows bumped into me and threw me over. I'll go with you, but don't hold me like that—"

The policeman looked him over shrewdly. The crowd—a menacing one—had grown swiftly and was pressing close. There was no chance of breaking away, and something in Bob's voice halted him. He removed his hand, saying:

"Stand right where you are, young fellow! If you try any breaks—"

"I'm giving you my word I'll stay," said Bob. "I've nothing to run for!"

The officer opened the patrol box and called up the station, while Bob's eyes blazed upon the chattering, menacing crowd. This was the same crowd that had cheered so lustily when he had embarked for the front; the same crowd that had cheered upon his return; the usual temperamental mob that is always so willing to love you passionately one day or to stone you to death the next!

It was growing dark now, and myriad electric lights along the street began to twinkle. An eddy in the shifting crowd that surrounded him caught his eye. Another patrolman was pushing his way through the densely packed humanity to his side.

"Hold on to him, Joe!" he called to the officer who stood near Bob. "Looks like old man Bedson was seriously wounded!"

A fresh tremor of excitement ran through the mob. The second policeman stood close

to Bob and clutched his sleeve. A barely perceptible signal was exchanged by the two officers. Bob started at the second man's touch. His liberty was gone! He restrained himself with difficulty from any show of resistance, until, with a simultaneous movement, both policemen laid hands on him and he felt the cold chill of steel handcuffs touching his wrists.

The first officer had broken faith with him! Trusted, he would have made no move and accompanied him as he had promised; deceived, the chains of his promise were broken, and now, as the cold steel sought his wrists, all he was conscious of was a furious revolt. All the wild blood in him, his inherent honor, the pride of his breeding, all the life and soul that were in him, flashed into fiery action.

He wrenched his wrists free before the locks could close, and with a single, rapid blow he felled the first officer; the second never knew what hit him, but it was Bob's left fist. Then, like a tiger breaking his way through a circle of beaters, he hurled through the shrieking crowd, striking right and left, and ran down the avenue. The crowd took up the chase immediately, now thoroughly inflamed and in earnest.

For one instant the thought occurred to him that he was running away. Flight! A loathing sense filled him. The criminal's resource—the craven's refuge!

A shot rang out. The policemen had recovered their feet. He wished, in that moment of agony, that the bullet might reach him and kill rather than be driven to this.

With the speed that had carried him to more than one victory in his university days, he fled rapidly up a side street. The hue and cry was after him. The crowd's excitement was raised; it knew not why or wherefore; and it was joined with the keener pursuit of men organized for the work of man-hunting.

It was dark now. His chances of escape was increased. He felt a hunted thing—a coward—a felon, yet he increased his speed, for all the wilder blood in him awoke, spurring his strength and heating his veins. They might kill him, but he swore to die free!

Westward, toward the river, he ran, dou-

bling like a hunted fox; now walking rapidly through a lighted area, then turning into a dark street and spurting again. Always he heard yells in his wake, but these were growing fainter. He was dropping them behind.

He approached the river and stopped for the first time. His blood was beating in every vein and his brain was numbed; his heart pumped furiously and his lips drew breath with gasping spasms; in his ears was a rushing roar.

Glancing behind he saw the two officers emerge from the shadows of a quiet street. Without a moment's hesitation, he went over the wall and into the river.

There was a yell behind him. The shock of cold water drove the breath out of him, and he came to the surface.

"There he is!" cried a voice from the dock of a ferry. A moment's pause, then a flash and a report, a line of light flared a second and a bullet hissed past him and splashed into the river.

He dived and swam upcurrent under water.

"He's hit!" cried those on shore. "Get a boat—he went under!"

Steadily fighting his way upstream and allowing only his nose to come to the surface for air occasionally, he reached mid-stream.

He saw a rowboat investigating the waters about the shore and guessed that they believed him hit and drowned. The night was dark, fortunately for him, and he floated for a minute, resting his tortured limbs and lungs. Then he swam cautiously to the other shore.

Here all was dark. A storm seemed to be brewing, for the heavens grew murky with cloud rack. Dropping quietly down the river, he came to a rowboat tied to a small wharf. Into this he climbed and lay upon the bottom prostrated, his blood beating in his brain, his breath painful, his limbs quivering after the intense muscular effort.

His eyelids, heavy as lead, closed unconsciously and he lost all sense and memory. How long he lay there he never knew, but when consciousness returned, he saw a gem-spangled sky above. A rising wind was rocking the boat gently.

To stay was impossible. The shore was dangerous. Cautiously he unfastened the boat, took up the oars and slipped like a ghost down the dark, quiet river. He gathered the impression that it must be after midnight, for few crafts plowed the usually busy stream.

He rowed steadily. They gray dawn found him out at sea. Then he lost an oar. Unable to recover it, he used the other as a paddle and began to go in a southerly direction, thinking to go ashore somewhere on that coast.

At eight o'clock, or thereabout, a small steamer bore down on him and he managed to attract its attention. Taken on board, he simply explained that he had been night fishing and had lost his way in the dark.

The captain informed him that the vessel was on its way to Havre with a load of cattle, and couldn't turn back.

France! He had spent nearly two years there, and had a fair smattering of the language. France had bestowed a medal upon him in appreciation of his services; he had some friends there. Why not—since his own country had treated him so shabbily?

So he arranged to work his passage over, while the captain puzzled for several moments over the various species of blankety-blank fools to be found in the so-called human race.

CHAPTER II.

A MISSION FOR MOY SONG.

IN a far corner of the South Pacific you will find Norfolk Island. It is cast away all by itself in a world of water several hundred miles from the Queensland coast.

Everybody must know the story of the mutiny of H. M. S. *Bounty*. It is a most enthralling and romantic narrative of fact. Of the tyranny and hazing that led to the desperate seizure of a king's ship; how the mutineers returned to Tahiti, took wives from among the natives, sailed to little Pitcairn Island and burned the *Bounty*; founded a colony and a race of people as unique as any in the world; quarreled, fought and killed one another, and finally thrived and multiplied until Pitcairn was too small to

hold them. Then they were brought back to Norfolk Island in 1857—sixty-five years after the mutiny.

The descendants of the mutineers are living upon Norfolk Island to-day—a strange people, who speak a quaint language compounded of English, Tahitian and sailor slang. Their gentle, caressing voices, intensely musical, remind you of their Tahitian extraction; and the beauty of some of their women tells of the English blood that flows in their veins. Here, in some instances, the races have fused and blended to produce the best in each—unbelievable exotics whose beauty is breathtaking and clamorous.

These were Zelma Forsythe's people. Her history was brief.

Her mother, a strikingly beautiful girl, had been seen by Tom Forsythe, first mate of the trading schooner *Shark*. It was love at first sight for both. Tom Forsythe had left his ship and married her, and had spent a full, blissful year upon the island with his young wife. Then Zelma was born—and her mother died. In his vivid despair, insane with grief, his unreasoning agony, Tom Forsythe had cursed the daughter who had cost him his wife. He left the island never to return.

The English mission had taken in the child and raised it while Tom went up and down the islands, drinking himself into an early grave, deteriorating rapidly. Becoming lazy and lax-minded, he forgot that a world existed outside. His grief became a tradition, and he hated the daughter whose existence had been bought at such a tremendous price.

He sent money regularly for the child's support, but he would not go near her. She wrote him letters which he never answered. He instructed the mission people never to send him any of her photographs.

Some twenty years later he sat in the gambling house of Moy Song, in Macao—a Portuguese-controlled settlement on the Chinese coast just below Hongkong—and gazed with startled, drunken gravity upon a photograph of his daughter which she had sent him on her nineteenth birthday. It was the first likeness of her he had ever beheld.

She was very like her mother—lovelier, if anything; a full-blown English rose with an exotic touch from the Tahitian blood that made her bewildering; a lofty, poetic, soul-lit loveliness; and a patrician grace that told of the early Norman blood that came to her through her father.

A corrosive remorse ate into his heart as he looked, and tears rolled, unrestrained, down his wasted, furrowed cheeks. He drank deeply that night, and his outraged constitution gave way at last.

They found him the next morning, safe in port at last, a smile on his sunburned face, his hand clutching the photograph and a letter that had come with it.

Moy Song, a quiet, elegant Chinaman, owner of the gambling establishment and several vessels—one of which Tom Forsythe had commanded for years—took the photograph and letter and went to his private room with both.

Here he read the letter—a wistful, lonely epistle; then his eyes were lured again by the photograph, and he sat in a fascinated silence for some time.

Finally his shrewd eyes began to stray about the luxuriously furnished room, and he hummed an endless, plaintive melody, his fingers beating an intermittent tattoo upon the table.

Suave, successful, learned in all the wiles of the polyglot races that mixed under his roof, he was a power in Macao because of his wealth—though there were rumors of his participation in opium-smuggling and raids upon certain islands for anything from pearls to women. Ostensibly, he dealt in copra and *bêche de mer*. He had a white wife. As far as Macao knew, they lived happily together, and he was a good husband, giving her everything that money could buy.

He ordered that Tom Forsythe be given decent burial; then he sent for one of his captains, a burly Italian who had done his bidding upon more than one occasion to their mutual financial advantage. Over a bottle of wine in his own rooms, Moy Song talked long and seriously to the hulking Italian.

"Take a crew of Kanakas," he instructed, "and go to Norfolk Island. You'll take

this letter along and this photograph, and you'll tell the girl that her father is on the point of death and wishes her to come at once."

The Italian nodded understandingly, a twisted smile upon his full lips.

"Simply say that he sent you to bring her, show the photograph and letter as evidence—and here's a ring of his, too—and bring her to me. See that it so happens that you put in here late at night."

Again the Italian nodded, his eyes narrowing slightly. In a somber way, he was a handsome man, with blood in his veins that had once run full and strong in the lustful lords of Sardis. His father had been a wild, mountain hunter in the Etruscan Hills; the son was the true robber chieftain and adventurer of romance.

"And—what's this worth to me?" he asked. "This is a great risk. She's no Island woman, you know."

Moy Song glanced around the room as if to assure himself that he was alone with the captain. He took a pencil from his pocket, wrote a sum upon a piece of paper and showed it to his companion. The Italian's eyes glittered. It was more than he had expected; still—the girl was beautiful and worth it.

"And she's not to be roughly treated," went on Moy Song, in his caressing, low voice. "She's not to be harmed—in any way. Do you understand?" His voice and eyes were significant.

The Italian nodded brusquely.

"The money is more to me," he answered shortly. "than any woman. You know that!"

Moy Song smiled faintly. He knew it well. That was one reason he had selected Montozzi.

"And," he went on quietly, "when she gets here and has no complaint to make I'll double that sum to you."

Montozzi stared. Moy Song was paying high. He looked at his fastidious employer in frank curiosity.

"She's yours, Song," he said, rising. "I'll drift out to-night."

He put the ring, the letter, and the photograph in his pocket, shook hands with his elegant employer, and departed.

Then Moy Song made his way to the other side of the house where his white wife had her apartment. Knocking, he entered immediately after and looked with slant-eyed disapproval upon a worn, once pretty girl, who sat reading a magazine and smoking a cigarette. She was dressed in an exquisite silk jacket and trousers, Chinese fashion, and her hair was combed *a la* Mme. Butterfly, with a huge, jeweled comb at the back.

She looked up, smiled in a tired fashion, and went on reading and smoking.

Moy's eyes contracted slightly. He walked to her side and took the cigarette from her lips.

"The illustrious White Lily," he murmured, throwing the cigarette on the floor, "should not smoke in my humble home. It befits not the wife of Moy Song—"

"Oh, stop that 'illustrious' stuff!" she cried, springing to her feet. "I'm tired of it! I'll smoke if I want to—I have to do something to keep from going crazy!"

"All right," he answered calmly, in a different voice, "I'll stop the 'illustrious' stuff. But let me tell you that I want your dance-hall habits stopped while you are here. I'm becoming tired of some of your habits. Don't forget that if I hadn't been fool enough to marry you, you'd have wound up like—" He paused and pointed downward, as a burst of some Kanaka girls' liquor-tuned laughter rose to them from the dance hall below.

The girl sniffed.

"I'd never come to that!" she answered defiantly. "I went around a lot, but I was a good girl—you know that!"

He did not answer. He paused at the door and said sarcastically:

"The humble husband of the most illustrious White Lily wishes her a most restful night!" And he closed the door.

The girl shrugged disdainfully. Then she began to play with a pet snake which she took from a box—a tiny, green, harmless thing that turned and twisted around her fingers as she crooned and whispered to it.

"I prefer you," she whispered to the reptile, "to him!"

Then she defiantly lit another cigarette.

Moy Song walked slowly to his own room, his eyes inscrutable.

"We shall see," he murmured to himself. "We shall see!"

At daybreak the Water Queen, with Captain Montozzi at the wheel, stole out of Macao harbor and pointed her nose southward. She carried a full Kanaka crew and a Portuguese mate.

CHAPTER III.

SHIPPED TO NOUMEA.

BOB CARTER counted himself safe and began to plan life anew upon his arrival in France. He underestimated, however, the cleverness of police brains. Because the ship he had taken involuntary passage upon was not equipped with wireless, he forgot about it.

This is what happened: the rowboat he had borrowed was reported missing to the police, and they put two and two together with a sure logic. His landlady, after two days' absence, became choleric because he owed her money and reported his disappearance to the police. She wanted him arrested or she wanted her bill paid.

The police again investigated, searched his room and effects, found some letters and papers and a photograph. The photograph was promptly identified by two policemen and several members of the crowd that had witnessed Bob's capture and escape.

Swift inquiries were sent broadcast. Then a police tug picked up a lost oar in the bay. It was identified by the owner of the boat. Shrewd brains began to study the list of vessels that had sailed that same night and early morning.

The chase was finally narrowed down to two commercial freighters—both bound for French ports!

As the freighters took nearly three weeks to cross, a copy of Bob's photograph was sent immediately by a fast mail and passenger steamer to the detective headquarters of Paris. The destinations of the two freighters were given. Would the French police hold the prisoner—providing he was on board either freighter—until a man could be sent to bring him back?

The wireless was brought into instant use, and the story and request duplicated, advising the French police of the explanatory mail following upon the Aquitania.

The wireless crackled back a reply shortly that the French police would be watching.

In the meanwhile the jeweler whose store the thieves had attempted to rob lay at the point of death, delirious or unconscious. As he was a rich man and an influential citizen, the police bent every energy and resource to capture the man they believed would finally be tried upon a murder charge. As for the actual thieves, they had vanished as completely as if they had dropped off the earth.

So it was that when the freighter put into Havre three weeks later, two quiet, ferret-eyed men came on board, had a chat with the captain, and a few minutes later deftly handcuffed Bob as he stood looking unsuspectingly over the rail.

Entreaty or explanation had no effect upon the Frenchmen. It was a bitter and a somewhat dangerous Bob who was lodged in a cell to await extradition.

And as the days went by he grew reckless and daring. The injustice of his incarceration made him as savage as a sorely wounded animal. He brooded, grew morose, bitter. Plans for daring escapes flashed in his mind continually, though he knew them all futile.

He was treated decently enough, but he snarled like a trapped thing when spoken to. At other times a weary, blighting resignation rested upon him with the weight of lead.

As the weeks dragged by, he grew nervous and curious. Why wasn't he taken back and tried? Did they expect to let him rot and die in this French prison?

He became insubordinate and stubborn, his self control was at an end. One day, prodded sharply by a burly, ignorant guard, he whirled and attacked him with all the seething, accumulated fury that was in him.

The guard was taken by surprise. Bob lifted him bodily and flung him down; he was badly hurt. The physical action somehow seemed to make Bob feel better. His attack earned him a solitary cell. He de-

manded to know why he was not returned to his own country. He was informed that he would be as soon as some one came for him.

But no one came. There were hot moments of rebellion when Bob's eyes would flash. He chafed sorely, and his breath came uneven and fast with the proud bold instincts of birth and freedom; but there was no relief.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the ocean, there was an annual political shake-up of the police department—rival factions sparring for power—and Bob was forgotten along with other matters of like importance. No one was sent after him. Other fresher matters claimed public attention. The world is a busy place.

And Bob, made insanely savage by his solitary confinement, rebelled again, and was dubbed an "incorrigible" by the prison head, to whom he was a thorn in the side.

"I don't want him here," he explained to his superior. "He is like a tiger—he will kill some day."

"But what shall we do with him?"

"Do? Anything to get him out! He's a bad example and perfectly fearless! Some of my other incorrigibles are going to Noumea soon. I'll send him along. If the Americans want him, they can get him there. I don't want to be bothered with him! He almost killed one of my guards."

The superior officer had a dinner engagement and was in a hurry, so he shifted the burden.

"Well," he said, "do as you think best. The Americans are playing politics again, anyway, and they'll forget all about him. I suppose he could be here for years before they'd send for him—if they ever did! Can't you spare a man to take him back to the United States?"

"I have no man nor funds for it," explained the warden. "It would be weeks and maybe months before I could arrange it, and in the meanwhile he'd kill some one! No, I'll ship him to Noumea, and get him off my hands! This prison won't hold him anyway. He'll get out of here sooner or later and be a menace to the community. He'll be safe in Noumea, anyway! Will it be all right?"

"Oh, I suppose so! Send a letter and tell them the circumstances. Then they can do as they wish."

The letter was sent. Possibly it arrived.

Thus, by special arrangement with the inscrutable fates, Bob, in common with other "incorrigibles" from various prisons in France, was sent to Noumea, in New Caledonia. Yes, the fates were weaving!

CHAPTER IV.

A DESPERATE TRY.

IT was weeks later when his eyes first beheld New Caledonia. Its solitude was uncanny, flung down as it is in the immensity of the South Pacific. Long lines of breakers marked the coral reefs. A tall lighthouse stood apparently in the sea behind the lines of surf; cold, blue mountain ranges pierced the sky in the interior. It was a wild, forbidding country that struck a chill to his heart. Surrounded by hundreds of miles of open, shark-infested waters, there seemed to be no possibility of escape.

The convict ship did not go to the town, but stopped opposite Isle Nou, with its grim prisons and barracks, an orderly inferno where are confined the most desperate and abandoned of the obstreperous exiles who form the main portion of the population of New Caledonia.

In the distance Bob saw the little leaf-bowered town, a mosaic of gleaming roofs on the edge of a tropical jungle.

The new arrivals watched the gangs of orderly prisoners, under guard, at work; and a hopeless despair settled upon their features. This was the end. All who entered New Caledonia left hope behind.

Then began for Bob a nightmare existence that sapped his body and his brain. One fiercely torrid day succeeded another with unfailing regularity. All day the gaunt, unhappy prisoners toiled upon the mainland, and at night, packed to overflowing upon huge barges, they were towed back to their cells on the island.

Day after day they toiled and slaved in the blinding heat, always under the surveillance of prison wardens, who lolled under

enormous white cotton umbrellas, and at whose ample girths were strapped huge revolvers.

There came periods of passionate rebellion to Bob; of insurgent heartsickness. He longed, with an agonized desire, to stand once more stainless among his equals; to taste once more the nectar of liberty, of unchallenged, unfettered life. Liberty lured him with an insidious temptation. Under the lash of prison rules, and the noxious bitterness that came at the thought of the injustice being heaped upon him, a venom grew and poured into his heart and veins. Sooner or later it would burst forth.

He wondered dully how long it would be before he went mad and made a dash for freedom. He saw what this action would result in one day when a prisoner, driven desperate by toil and heat, ran for some adjacent brush. The guard shifted the umbrella and, without rising, shot down the unfortunate man unerringly. Then he lit a fresh cigarette—upon which scores of longing eyes were fixed—and glared at the other prisoners.

"Let that be a lesson," he said, as the wounded man was carried away.

Bob's cell mate, a young Frenchman of perhaps twenty-seven, was unduly excited and paced the small cell incessantly.

"Murderers!" he whispered tensely. "To shoot a man so—like a rabbit—because he loves life and liberty!"

Bob did not answer. He sat in a physical stupor after the day's work in the white sun, and glanced helplessly about the bare cell. There was no way of escape. What hope he had possessed was slowly vanishing. The massive bars and walls held him impotent.

He watched Chataine, his cell mate, as that volatile young man paced the floor, back and forth, with seemingly boundless energy. Because he played in the band, he was allowed to keep his hair, and he also wore a boy's growth of Vandyke beard. He would have been handsome had he not been so gaunt.

At first he had snarled at Bob and resented his entrance into the cell. But, as the weeks went by, he thawed out and became companionable, though Bob found

himself being examined at odd moments with curious, veiled glances that puzzled him.

They had, one evening, in a burst of mutual confidence, exchanged histories, and Chataine had been highly indignant at the manner in which Bob had been mistreated.

His own story he stated briefly, and the look on his face convinced Bob that he spoke the truth.

"It was my sister's husband," Chataine explained. "She married a pig—a camel, who was slowly killing her. I could do nothing, for it was her husband. Then he took to beating her—and she fled to me for protection. That fired my blood—my little sister! He tried to strike her, and when I stopped him he became a demon—mad! He pulled out a revolver, and in the struggle for possession he was shot!"

"They said I killed him, and because I rebelled so furiously I was sent here! *Dieu de Dieu!* I ask you—is this justice?"

Chataine quivered with rage as he told the story. When he became calmer he again eyed Bob in his curious, questioning, inscrutable fashion.

The work was beginning to wear down even Bob's splendid constitution. To-night, weary, aching in every fiber, he watched the nervous Chataine in his endless pacing.

"Some day," he said, "I'll do the same thing, Chataine. Better death than—this!"

Chataine halted abruptly and sat down at Bob's side upon the iron cot.

"No, my friend," he whispered; "don't do that! You can't escape that way. Even if you got away into the interior, the natives would finish you—oh, they're bad customers, these 'man-belong-bush' here! Bear it—perhaps—"

"Perhaps what?" asked Bob wearily. "Do you think I can bend those bars, drop a hundred feet into a shark-infested lagoon and swim to Australia?"

Chataine rose, paced up and down a few times, and then paused again.

"One can never tell," he answered in a low voice. "Do nothing rash. Perhaps—"

Bob looked into his cell mate's face at the suggestive tone. A faint hope began to stir.

"You know of some—"

"Hush!" hissed Chataine. "I know nothing! But—I am desperate! Listen—if the opportunity should come—we'll—we'll go—together?"

Bob thrust his hand out for answer, and their fingers locked in a tight clasp. Chataine was strangely excited.

"Who knows?" he whispered. "One can never tell! Something may turn up so we can escape this living death. I feel I can trust you, Bob."

"You can," replied Bob quietly.

A little later Chataine left, for it was band night, and he had to play. Twice a week the band played for the edification of the civilian inhabitants of the town.

The sweet strains of music could be heard in the grim, silent penitentiary, softened by distance as it came wafted across the star-studded lagoon, and mingling with the murmur of the southern ocean.

What a mockery it was for those prisoners to play, and see the groups of statuary, symbolical of liberty and labeled as such, that occupied conspicuous places in Coconut Square!

More than one pair of longing, helpless eyes sought the circle of brilliant flame trees and tried to peer beyond to the wilderness where liberty might be found. Then their envious eyes would rest upon the civilian crowds sitting at the little tables outside the surrounding cafés; the police and soldiers, and the guards who sat upon the band stand with carbines across their knees.

It was strange they could play at all—these incorrigibles, who took no pleasure in their music. All gaunt men, with pallid, starved-looking faces that were stolid, sorrowful, savage, cunning or desperate—but always unhappy.

Chataine played a cornet solo that night, and played amazingly well. He seemed to be in an excitable, electric mood. He was congratulated again and again. He did not tell them that he had been a musician of note in Paris before his unfortunate affair.

The next day an admirer sent Chataine a great bunch of flowers and a cheap, small alarm clock. The warden finally allowed Chataine to keep it in his cell, but not before he had looked inside to see that it contained nothing but what an alarm clock

should, and had taken off the glass face. He wasn't going to give any prisoner glass to be used as a means of self destruction. Not he!

A clock is a much-wanted article by most prisoners. Why, I cannot say. Let the learned psychologists answer. The passing hours should certainly have no interest for men who are serving for terms of years and some for life.

At any rate, Chataine was overjoyed, and the whole prison envied him. Some of them, within hearing of his cell, called out at night to know what time it was. Chataine petted and fondled the cheap little timepiece as if it were worth its weight in diamonds.

Bob was amused, and touched, too. It took very little to make Chataine happy. The cheery ticking of the clock helped him, too, he confessed.

On one occasion he went to wind it, and Chataine sprang upon him like a tiger.

"No!" he snarled. "Don't dare touch it! No hands can touch it but mine—understand?"

Bob was astonished. For weeks Chataine had been in almost a sunny mood; now he became a fury for no apparent reason.

Bob shrugged.

"As you wish," he said, seating himself. "I meant no harm."

"No—my friend!" continued the mercurial Chataine, contritely. "I meant no offense—but it is precious to me—a gift—I want no one to touch it—do you see?"

Then he left to play, for it was band night again.

That night as Bob slept he felt a cold hand upon his shoulder. Opening his eyes he saw Chataine sitting at his side, cautioning him to silence. He sat up, puzzled.

"No noise—no sound!" whispered Chataine. He was fairly quivering with suppressed excitement. "The time is here," he continued, barely above his breath. "We go to-night!"

Bob's eyes opened wide now.

"I'll explain, Bob," continued Chataine; "you will learn more later. I'm trusting you. If you fail me—" There was deadly menace in the Frenchman's voice.

"Why should I fail you?" asked Bob. "I have as much at stake as you have. Lead on, Paul—if there's a ghost of a chance, we'll go through—or—take what comes. Once I start, I swear I'll never come back."

"Good!" murmured Chataine. He listened intently. No sound disturbed the silent building.

"There is a girl," he continued presently, still in a cautious whisper, "in the town—an English girl, a teacher in the schools. When I came here I first saw her from the band shell. Later she talked to me. We fell in love—yes—she loves me—branded as a criminal!"

His voice broke slightly.

"I tell you, Bob, while there are such women on earth, there's little need of heaven! For a year now we have had our little meetings occasionally, on band nights. At length she planned that I should escape—you may be sure I did not suggest it first to her—not to the woman I love better than life—or my hope of heaven!

"I saw her to-night for several minutes. I have been here long enough to know that one cannot escape without aid from the outside, and the warden knows I know it. He doesn't dream any one would help—that's why he sometimes sends me on errands.

"She saw me leave on my errand to-night and followed me. I ran to the cathedral in back of the town—walking through the Rue Austrelitz, across the Rue Inkerman and Sebastopol, and no one stopped me. I waited for her in the shadow of the statue of Jeanne d'Arc. It took but a moment. Everything is ready!

"She has made all preparations. She goes with us. At the first opportunity we will be married. Now you know."

Bob stared.

"But how are you going to get out?" he asked.

Chataine chuckled quietly.

"We'll go through the window and into the water—the lagoon has few sharks. We'll swim to a certain point—you'll follow me—where she will meet us. Almost all the guards are in town to-night at the garrison dance—I played sick and got away from playing. Now—have you the heart

for it? It is desperate, Bob; it may mean—"

"Anything!" breathed Bob. "I'm with you! Anything is better than this!"

"Then to work!"

To Bob's astonishment the Frenchman began taking his treasured alarm clock apart. Swiftly, silently, it came apart in his long fingers until the long mainspring dangled in the narrow strip of moonlight that flooded in through the heavily barred window.

Then Bob saw that the reverse—inside—of the spring was filed—it was, in truth, a long steel saw of the finest, keenest metal!

"An idea of mine!" whispered Chataine gleefully. "It couldn't be seen if the clock was opened, and it allowed the clock to run! Now, to work! It is eleven o'clock. By morning we must be far to be safe—make every moment count!"

Working as quietly as possible, desisting at every shadow of sound, hearts beating fiercely, they worked. The bars were heavy iron, but not hard. The prison was of ancient construction, and the metal was old-fashioned, forge bars. The keen steel bit into it, yet it was slow, arduous work. Somewhere in town a clock told them that it was twelve when the last metal was cut through.

Chataine picked up the clock, its parts and the saw and put them in his pocket.

"I don't want them to know how it was done," he whispered; then: "I'll go first—follow me. Dive as quietly as you can. I'll show you the way through the shallow waters so that we'll take the least chances with—sharks. But should it happen, you'll see a rowboat burning *three* small lamps—red, white, and green. Go to it—don't stop to help me—it will be too late—and I'll do the same."

Their hands met in a tight clasp. It was life or death. The Frenchman suddenly raised his face to the brilliant skies and his eyes closed.

"Oh, God!" he murmured, "help us!"

Bob turned away suddenly, abashed. He heard Chataine murmuring something about "Ada"; the light was blocked out as his body filled the window and then it came again. Below Bob heard a faint *sw-w-ish!*

Without a moment's hesitation he climbed to the window. There he poised a second to measure the distance, and then dived into the sea.

CHAPTER V.

THE UNCHARTED ISLE.

IT was a long, dizzy drop—more than a hundred feet—and Bob thought he would never reach the surface again. Lungs almost bursting with the prolonged submersion, he came to the surface finally and breathed deeply. Recovering, he kept his body below, only allowing part of his head to show. Ahead he descried Chataine swimming noiselessly and powerfully. All about them the tropic night glowed with an Elysian luster. The prison was dark and quiet. So far, all was well. He followed Chataine.

Once the thought of sharks came to him, and he recalled Chataine's tragic injunction. A thrill of horror raced through him, pricking his flesh, but he resolutely put it aside. Years seemed to be slipping from his shoulders. The taste of freedom was sweet in his mouth. The thrill of adventure, the lure of the tropics, all were calling to the warm stream in his veins. Freedom at last! He thrilled in answer to the thought. Grimly he resolved to die rather than to go back to the prison.

Some thirty minutes later they both climbed into a small tender moored in the shadow of a tiny cove, and Chataine clasped the figure of a girl to his heart with many murmured endearments.

Bob sat in the back and turned his face toward the sea. A passion like this he had never known. That a woman would risk so much for a man he had never believed. He glanced back over the water. All was quiet and calm under the white witchery of the moon. So far, their escape had not been discovered.

Paul's voice broke in on him.

"This is Bob, whom I told you of, Ada," he was saying, "and this, Bob, is Ada. We owe her everything, Bob—life itself. She planned it all for me—is giving up all that most women hold dear—"

"Hush!" whispered the girl, laying slim, white fingers upon Paul's lips. "I am sure Mr.—Bob will understand. Now, quickly, if you have rested, for we have miles to go."

Both men settled to the oars, and, directed by the girl, stole along the shore to the north. While they rowed the girl enlightened Bob. She was a wholesome, good-looking girl, one who breathed of the fresh outdoors and athletics. Bob was struck by one fact—there was an unusual distance between her eyes.

"I have a thirty-five-foot sloop," she was telling him, "with mains'l and jib and spare sails. It has a cabin, is sound and seaworthy, and is fully stocked—for our trip—even if it should take months. And she's fast."

"I pretended a more than usual interest in island cruising, and bought her with my savings. It has taken six months and infinite caution to get her ready. I left a message that I have gone to Pau to buy a pearl. I frequently go there—it's only forty-five miles. I said I'd be back in a week. I hope to gain that much start. The rest is simple. They'll think you both went inland. Most attempts to escape are made so. Perhaps we'll get a week's start. It's all we need."

Bob nodded. He examined the calm girl again as he listened to her crisp words. He even smiled slightly. The distance between her eyes meant something more than mere facial space. Paul was indeed a lucky man!

Within an hour they were aboard the Hawk. Bob's heart leaped high with hope when he saw the trim, stanch sloop, with its heavily built hull and cabin, its racy lines. In his boyhood he had sailed a cat-boat and a canoe equipped with a sail upon the Hudson, so he had a slight familiarity with the mode of procedure. He fell to and helped the girl and Chataine hoist the sails. With hardly a sound the Hawk pointed her nose into the phosphorescent sea. Ada stood at the wheel.

"First trick at the wheel!" she laughed excitedly, in her full, throaty voice. "I know this boat, and I'll get her out to sea. If they should ever think that I had a hand

in Paul's freedom, they'll imagine we went due north to the Solomons or east to Queensland. I don't think they'll ever suspect me, though. They'll think you went inland. Anyway, we're headed into the Coral Sea, nor-nor'west. In three days the whole French navy couldn't find us!"

Both men stood and watched her with an admiration that could find no tongue. She stood silent for a minute, then went on: "Don't think me a desperate character, Bob. I'm not. I did this first for Paul. I know he is innocent, and a great injustice has been done him. If I hadn't helped, he might have—died there before anything could be done for him.

"He told me your story, and we both were sure you were innocent, too. Sometimes the gods conspire to mean things—then—then—we must do what we think best and right." She paused again, her voice uncertain; then, with concern: "Go below, Paul, and change your clothes. You're wet through, and you're not strong. There's a change for both of you. As soon as Paul is through, you can change. I don't like your—prison garb."

Bob lingered at the task of changing into dry civilian clothes. Above he heard the murmur of the lovers' voices. He smiled and resolved to give them an opportunity to talk to their hearts' content on this their first uninterrupted meeting.

He examined the snug little cabin, divided into two separate parts; the boxes of provisions and canned fruits; the water casks, axes; the two serviceable Martini-Henry rifles, fishing tackle, tins of tobacco, rope, matches, instruments, and many other articles.

He lit a pipe, reveling in the long-lost luxury, and examined one of the rifles. The Hawk began to feel the motion of the big rollers, and the sails became taut. She raced away, the wind strong and steady. The girl had thought of everything, Bob reflected. There was even a cask of oil for the lamps and cooking utensils; a pistol hung in a holster, several clocks, a small demijohn of rum, and—even a supply of books.

"Lucky devil!" Bob told his soul, thinking of Paul. "One girl in a million!"

Later he went on deck. The lovers sat close together at the wheel, and they hailed him as he turned away.

"You and I will finish the night at the wheel, Bob," said Paul, "while Ada gets some sleep in her cabin."

The girl went below, and the two men stood silently at the wheel, gazing out over the sea.

"Well?" asked Paul in a blithe voice.

Bob turned to look at the man. It was an entirely different Paul Chataine than he had ever observed before. A remarkable metamorphosis had taken place. He saw a handsome, straight-standing young man, whose cheeks were flushed and whose eyes shone with the life and animation and hope that freedom inspired.

"I think you are a very lucky man, Paul," said Bob quietly, putting a friendly hand upon Paul's arm.

"I—know," replied the other humbly. "It's all like a dream. I have already forgotten—Noumea. I owe my life to her. Think what she invites by helping us! Think! They could send *her* to prison! God help me to be worthy of her!"

His voice trembled with emotion. For some minutes they stood in a pregnant silence; then, deliriously happy, Paul broke out again:

"We'll touch somewhere long enough to be married; then we'll go far enough away that they'll never think of looking for us. It's easy to lose one's self among the islands. But you, my friend? Is there no one you wish to go to—no one waiting somewhere?"

"Not a soul," replied Bob.

"Then you shall go with us!" enthusiastically decided Paul.

"And where are you going?" asked Bob.

Paul did not answer immediately. When he did his voice was grave. "Heaven only knows! I suppose every large port will be watched—every civilized avenue of escape closed! I'm afraid we've but little choice—since we have no money to pave the way to justice. Ada and I have talked it over more than once.

"We thought we'd simply drop out of sight and live on one of the uninhabited islands. You know, there are thousands

as yet uncharted, where a white foot has never stepped. They are mostly fertile—fruit and game and fish—and we thought that after some years we could go to the United States and start all over again. That is what we have in mind to do. If you want to, you can come with us."

"I have no pressing engagements elsewhere," answered Bob after a moment's thought. "I'll go with you."

"Good!" exclaimed Chataine. "And now for a voyage of discovery to find an uncharted island! Our first stop is Aola, where Ada and I will be married. There's only a lone missionary there—no cables or wires, thank Heaven! Then for the Coral Sea!

"You know," he went on with the excited air of a boy on a holiday, "I've always wanted to come to these islands—since I've been a boy. I used to study their history in utter fascination, and I could name every one and give you its history—if it had any. I never thought, though, that my first sight of them would be—Noumea."

The night passed uneventfully. They talked and planned and learned once more how to laugh. The next day they touched for an hour at Aola, where an astonished white missionary hastily married Paul and Ada, was hugged enthusiastically by both, and watched them sail out of sight. Then he went back to his primitive abode on the edge of a wilderness of tropical jungle, where he lived and wrestled valiantly with the native "man-belong-bush." He was no fool, this missionary. He had a shrewd suspicion regarding the two men; but when he thought of the girl he smiled. "Unless I'm asked," he told himself, "I'll say nothing."

For a week all went well. The honeymooners were deliriously happy; and Bob, finding himself in the great, wonderful open of the Coral Sea, was as happy as he had ever been in his life. No signs of a chase, or any craft whatever had as yet been encountered.

On the fourteenth day Paul slipped and fell, hurting his ankle severely. When it was found that he could not walk it was decided that they would land upon the first island that seemed uninhabited.

On the fifteenth day they sighted a long, low island, heavily wooded. A hasty consultation of their maps and a survey of their position failed to reveal any sign of it being recorded.

Anchoring the Hawk in a sheltered cove, they brought Paul ashore in the tender, for his foot was now swollen badly and he could not use it at all.

The thick patches of woodland ran close to the dazzling white coral sands of the beach. In the treetops gayly colored parrots screeched and quarreled, while a cloud of pigeons whirled against the turquoise of the sky. Bougainvillea, red hibiscus and countless other flowers drugged the drowsy air with perfume, which mingled with the saline savor of the sea. Heat lay on the land like sleep on the eyes of a tired dreamer.

Bob stretched languidly, then explored the near-by woodland. He grinned genially at every primeval evidence. They found a species of natural cave, where they took up their habitation, and they planned to stay indefinitely. The island seemed fruitful, and they had no doubt that small game would abound. As for fish, they were sure of that.

The rifles, ammunition and various other articles were brought ashore, while they made themselves at home, disporting more like children than fugitives. It was decided that they would explore when Paul recovered the use of his ankle. Only one black bead was there in the golden rosary of their prospect—natives. No one voiced this possibility, but Paul had told Bob that many tribes were still utter savages, wild and untractable, and some still practiced cannibalism.

Still, there were no signs of human beings anywhere. It might have been the dawn of creation but for themselves. When a week slipped by and nothing disturbed the perfect peace of their retreat they forgot their fears.

Then, one evening, they heard what sounded like faint, distant gunshots. All three came to their feet, their meal forgotten, listening intently. Of course, they could not be sure; the sounds were too faint and far away. They were sobered. They

determined to keep the Hawk in instant readiness for flight, and also to reconnoiter cautiously the next day. That night both men lay with their rifles close by.

CHAPTER VI.

A GIFT FROM OTHER AGES.

BOB slept very little that night. A nervous fear haunted him. It would be too ghastly to be taken back to Noumea now—after this taste of freedom. Early the next morning it was decided that he was to go alone to reconnoiter. Paul's foot was still quite useless and he still hobbled with pain.

Both Paul and Ada cautioned Bob again and again, until he finally laughed. "I'll be very careful," he promised, though their affectionate concern brought a throb to his throat. "I'll not show myself, and I'll not go far. Don't worry, please. I'll be back by noon."

He set out and described a semicircle around their camp. The tropic forest flamed with flowers and abounded with small game, but he found no signs of humans. He wondered how long the island was, how wide, what lay over the range of low hills; but he had no time to explore farther, as he had promised to be back by noon, and he knew how his friends would worry if he should delay.

As he swung down toward the shore, intending to make his way back to camp over the white sands, he suddenly froze in his tracks. He had come full upon a sandy stretch, protected by long wooded arms that ran far to sea on both sides, and on the beach was the hull of a ship—apparently an ancient wreck.

The masts were gone, but the lines of her hull caused his eyes to widen. It looked like a fantasy of other centuries. "If I didn't know better," he told himself, "I'd be firmly convinced that Columbus lost one of his caravels here."

Greatly excited, intrigued by this survival of other centuries, he made his way to the hull, which lay partly in the shallows. It was green with age; plant life had found a foothold in many a favorable spot; yet

the stout hull itself had remained intact throughout the years.

He made out some letters upon her bow, carved upon a stout name plank. There was also the remains of a coat of arms; but parts had split and rotted and the balance was little more than a fungus composition.

He spelled the letters "l-i-a-a," eager to penetrate the identity of the old ship; but they meant nothing to him. "I wonder," he mused, "what I'll find inside her—some of her people—I wonder—" His mind was whirling with possibilities, gruesome expectations.

He dropped his rifle and scaled the sides. Once on deck, he looked about. It was grass-grown! Yet the stout cedar planks held. Gingerly, with beating heart, Bob walked to the cabins that slanted away aft. He tried a door. It disintegrated into pieces.

Then he started back with an exclamation of alarm, for a witch-flight of giant bats rushed past him. He shook himself, and, entering, saw that a great hole on one side permitted the gruesome creatures to enter and make it their home.

Inside he found some remains of what had once been furniture. Whatever article he touched fell away in his fingers like Chinese punk. Then he saw several chests of cedar, heavily copper bound, now green with age.

A hope—wild, impossible, thrilling—leaped in his heart. He broke open one chest easily enough and stepped back, disappointed. It contained what appeared to be several black vases and some black crosses.

He smashed open the next chest. A heap of gray ashes lay in it. Disappointed again, he stirred them with the back of an old worm-eaten mahogany chair. The ashes had once been clothes—tiny vestiges for identification still remained. And at the bottom he came upon some marvelous vases that were gem-studded so thickly with unmistakably fine jewels that he cried out with sudden vehemence.

A fortune! Rubies and sapphires and great rose-cut diamonds by the score! Searching further, he found a large quantity

of huge gold coins. They bore a mint mark, but were so worn that he could not make out the country of their issue.

Trembling now, he tore off his coat and filled it with the treasure. Leaping from the ship, he buried it in the sands near the foot of a great coconut palm. Several trips of this sort he made, until the contents of both chests were safe underground—except for some coins and one vase which he intended bringing back to his friends as evidence of their enormous good fortune. He picked up his rifle and fairly ran down the smooth sands. Soon he was forced to make several detours, but finally he was surprised to come upon the Hawk riding at anchor right before him. The treasure ship was not even half a mile away!

He burst in upon Paul and Ada in a galvanic fury of enthusiasm. As fast as he could he told them of his find, and offered the coins and the vase before their astonished eyes.

They stood looking at one another with mixed feelings, hardly daring to credit it all. Wealth such as this unlocked the gates of that world which had shut upon them in their poverty.

"But tell me," finally exclaimed the volatile Paul, "what was the name of the ship? Could you see? Was there anything to identify it? I used to know the history of these seas. Perhaps—"

Bob gave him the initials he had been able to decipher, and Paul wrote them down, puzzling over them intently.

"Now!" said Bob. "With money at our command, we can get justice!" His voice grew slightly acrid. "Without it we are incorrigibles; with it, we can go through the courts and prove—"

"We—we!" interrupted Paul. "You—not we! You found it—it's yours!"

Bob turned and surveyed his friend with narrowed eyes, while a smile stole about the corners of his mouth. Sternly he pointed a finger at the radiant Paul.

"Young man," he reproved, "I said *we*. This is half and half. There's enough for all of us, and I'm not—" He paused, and his face grew very grave. He turned to Ada, who was watching both men with her hands clasped in ecstatic joy, her eyes brilliant.

"It really is all yours," went on Bob quietly, nodding toward both of them. "If it were not for Ada and you, Paul, I would still be making roads under the broiling sun—or be dead because I'd made a dash for liberty. Let's not talk about it further."

"Oh—I—I—" began Ada, then her voice quavered and failed. She buried her head upon her husband's shoulder and wept.

"*Le bon Dieu* has been good to us, my sweet," murmured Paul, patting her shoulder. "Cry, little one, if you feel like it now—I do not mind tears of happiness! I—I—am very near it myself!" Then he shook his head almost impatiently. "But to work!" he cried, taking up his paper and pencil again, while Ada smiled through her tears. "What shall we do now, Bob?"

"Have something to eat!" suggested Bob gravely. "The treasure is safe—we'll decide after lunch—I'm hungry. Come on, Ada, I'll help you cook a meal. I'm a good cook—thanks to the army!"

While Bob and the girl busied themselves making a small fire, Paul sat hunched over his paper, his brow knit in furrows.

"I've got it!" he cried suddenly—so suddenly and unexpectedly that Ada dropped the coffee pot and Bob whirled.

"By the way you act," exclaimed Bob. "I'd rather say you had 'em! Heavens, man—you startled me!"

"Look!" cried Paul, pointing to the paper, and taking no note of Bob's levity. "You see? It fits in! Your ship, Bob, is the *Almiranta*! I'd swear to it!"

"Which," replied Bob, "means nothing in my young life! Who was she?"

"Don't you recall?" babbled the overwrought Paul. "About 1690, Mendana sailed from Lima, Peru, with four ships and four hundred people to colonize the Solomons. They were to come to San Cristoval, but instead were lost and made Santa Cruz in a storm. And that same night the *Almiranta*, one of the ships, disappeared from the ken of white men. Her fate was one of the many mysteries of the sea. Don't you recall it now? And think of our finding her—after three hundred years—and more!"

They stared at one another incredulously.

"Mendana, if I remember, died in the is—"

lands, and his chief pilot, Quiros, looked for the Almiranta, but gave up the search and went to Manila. I remember it all distinctly now—I used to pour over the story when I was a boy!"

"Well," said Bob, after a silence in which they had eyed one another with conflicting emotions, "I'm extremely grateful to Mr. Mendana—but I'm just as much grateful to you—and to Ada!"

He shook the grave shadow from his voice and continued more brightly:

"Let's get something to eat now. To-morrow we'll explore the rest of the Almiranta—or whatever her name was. We can't be sure, of course; the Spaniards who sailed out of Lima lost many treasure ships."

"To-morrow?" cried Paul. "To-morrow? Right after lunch!"

"But your foot?"

"You have no idea how much better it is!" grinned Paul. "The power of money is marvelous!"

Their simple meal began to take on the aspects of a feast, for good fortune is a stimulating condiment.

Then again, like an ominous threat, came three faint detonations—distant shots!

CHAPTER VII.

"AND WHAT A GIRL!"

THEY eyed one another with grave concern, their meal forgotten.

"Those were gun shots," said Paul Chataine quietly.

"What shall we do?" whispered Ada, white to the lips, her eyes resting upon her husband. For herself she felt no concern; but possible recapture or danger to Paul wrung her heart.

"This," decided Bob swiftly. "We'll leave our find here—it's safe where I put it under the tree. There are no marks in the sand, and no one could locate it in a hundred years. We have the latitude and longitude of this place and can find it again.

"In the meanwhile we'll take this one vase and the coins with us and look for some other island where we'll be undisturbed until their confounded man-hunt dies down.

"You and Paul go on board the Hawk, and make ready to sail, while I investigate and find out who is on this island with us. I can't imagine who would be firing shots in a place like this."

"Unless," answered Paul, "there are natives in the interior, and they have an old trade gun or two. The shots seem to come from over those hills."

"Well," continued Bob, "there's no sense in running out into the open sea until we know what we are trying to run away from. I'll go and have a look. In the meanwhile, get on board and be ready to sail."

He picked up his rifle again, stuffed an extra box of cartridges into his pocket and added a field glass to his equipment. Paul and Ada began to pack their belongings into the tender.

"I'll be back by evening, I hope," said Bob. "You'll see me on the beach."

"I hate to let you go alone," began Paul, his eyes full of affection for his friend, "but my foot—"

"Please—be careful!" called Ada.

Bob, who was already swinging toward the woods, turned and laughed.

"I promise," he answered gayly, "to be very careful! I'll eat no cannibals and I won't attack the French navy!"

With extreme prudence, making as little noise as possible, he made his way into the jungle. Above him the bright-hued parrots screamed in the green, tropic roof which seemed to be supported by the vine-clad trunks of mighty trees that reared skyward like cathedral pillars. Here and there grew groups of banana trees or graceful sago-palms; red hibiscus flowers made patches of color on the somber green of the grass; delicate mosses and feathery ferns were everywhere; and over all hung the moist, hot taint of the tropics.

It took him half an hour to reach the first low hills; then almost an hour to cross them. From their summits he saw that the island was apparently miles in length, a veritable Eden, as undisturbed as it must have been in the first, faint day of creation.

Reaching a height he caught the glitter of the sea before and below him. Evidently, the island was narrow.

Walking forward and wondering how to

account for the shots, he came to a natural opening in the jungle that permitted a clear view of the sea—and stopped abruptly.

Riding at anchor upon the gentle swell was a big two-master! That meant white men. What were they doing here? He immediately decided that this could not be part of a pursuit, for official French vessels were all steam power. Several shots sounded right before him. He slipped behind some dense underbrush and waited, his heart beating tumultuously. He could not see who was firing, as the heavy foliage intervened.

Speculating with excited curiosity he determined to push forward and get a glimpse of the people, whoever they were.

Crawling at times, dodging from tree to tree, he moved slowly toward the beach and stopped when he had a good view of it.

He saw several seminaked Kanakas gathering shells from the beach and dumping them in baskets; others, working from a small boat, seemed to be diving and bringing up more shells. A white man, so dark that he looked like a Kanaka, swung out of the woods carrying a shotgun and a string of pigeons.

Evidently, decided Bob, this was an island trader who had discovered a bed of pearl shell, and was taking it aboard. He breathed a sigh of relief. This ship would go sooner or later; then he and his companions could stay in peace as long as they felt it was necessary.

He was about to return to the Hawk when he remembered his glasses, and, curious to get a closer look at the man with the gun and the ship, he swept the beach. An exclamation left his lips.

With the aid of the glasses he saw another white man, swarthy, aquiline-featured, saturnine, who stood in the blue shadows of some coconut palms at the extreme right of the beach. He was leaning upon his rifle. And on a flat-topped stone sat a girl, dressed in white.

The glasses brought them face to face with him, and he caught his breath sharply and fell back a pace, staring with the blank stupidity of a bewildered and incredulous amazement. In all his life he had never seen such sheer, incomparable loveliness.

"A white girl!" he told his listening soul. "And what a girl! And that chap with her looks like a—pirate!"

He could see she was young, possessed of an indescribable patrician delicacy, mingled with youthfulness and a strange, foreign grace. The eyes were twin violet pools with gold-flecked pupils that would have driven a Velasquez to despair. The sneering, dangerous face of the man caused instant antipathy. It was leering, evil.

Eagerly he looked again at the girl, and something within him seemed to gush warm all at once and thrill in answer to her unusual beauty.

"Who can she be, I wonder?" he thought.

As he watched he noted swiftly that they seemed to be quarreling. Their voices did not reach him.

The man was arrogant and smiling leeringly; the girl was both angry and beseeching. Bob watched the soundless drama in utter fascination.

All at once the man stooped suggestively, and the girl slapped him. He laughed and caught her in his arms. They struggled sharply, the girl apparently frantic; but the man easily bent her arms away and kissed her; then he lifted his cobra-like head and laughed. The girl covered her face with her hands and sank upon her seat. A moment later when she removed them, Bob could see her face burning with a keen, unbearable, passionate shame.

A berserker rage began to mount in Bob's heart. A soundless oath was on his lips. He glanced at the Kanakas. They were laughing. Somehow, this further outraged Bob's inborn instincts of chivalry; to let this pass unchallenged was a mock at his manhood.

Suddenly flinging the rifle to his shoulder, he brought it to bear upon the white man; then he put it down again slowly. That wouldn't do. The girl might be a refractory wife—it might be a domestic quarrel, yet—

He noted that a high, palm-covered ledge came within a few feet of where the man and the girl were. Some instinct within him urged him to investigate further. Utterly oblivious of the chances he took in thus exposing himself, he crept forward,

and at length lay almost directly above them.

Peering over the ledge he saw them both, and the man's voice came to him distinctly. Glancing around he noted that the Kanakas on the beach could not see him. Parting the grass he looked over.

"What a fuss you make," the man was saying, "over one kiss!"

"When we get to Macao," the girl stormed, raising her face, her voice broken by sobs, "I'll tell my father. He'll teach you a lesson—you soulless b-brute!"

The man laughed heartily.

"Your father is dead, I tell you," he answered brutally. "Drank too much. Besides, a shrimp like that never caused me any worry! I could break two of him across my knee!"

"I don't b-believe he's dead!" the girl sobbed.

"You'll see," the man said, shrugging his shoulders; then: "Maybe we won't get back to Macao. I've found a bed of gold-edged pearl shell that ought to make me rich. I can sell it in any port for nine hundred a ton—then we can come back here, you and I, eh? This island isn't on the maps and no one knows of it—we could be here for years and no one would disturb us. It's out of the trading and passenger routes. Lucky our casks leaked and we had to come ashore for fresh water, eh?"

The girl's low sobbing was her only answer.

"Oh, stop it!" cried the man impatiently. "I hate a crying woman! Why, no one else would have treated you as well as I have! I'm master here and on my ship, and my will is law—do you understand what I mean?"

Still there was no answer, but she shivered under the lash of a veiled threat that she only partly comprehended.

A blaze of bitter blood shone in Bob's face. His teeth came together firmly. His instinct was to punish the man on the spot, but he saw that such an action would be worse than suicide for both. He would be captured, and that wouldn't help the girl. He held his sense of proportion and self-control with a firm hand.

"Something told me not to trust you,"

sobbed the girl. "I'd never have gone with you if I hadn't been so anxious to see my father—and you had the letter I sent him—w-whatever made him trust you to bring me—? Oh, I wish I was dead!"

"Oh, come—come!" said the man gruffly. "Let's not go over that again. You're here now—so why talk about it? As for the letter and the photograph—I have Moy Song to thank for them!"

"Look here," he went on, argumenting sullenly, "wouldn't you prefer me to a Chinaman? I promised I'd bring you back, but I never dreamed you'd turn out to be such a little beauty! He offered me a pretty stiff price to get you. Well, I'm passing that up because I like you—anyway, wouldn't you prefer me to him? He's a little, dried-up, yellow Chinaman, and he already has a white wife. Why not be sensible? He wouldn't marry you—he couldn't. I might. That's the difference! You've got me crazy about you—I'm off my head—I don't know what you've done to me—" He stopped and looked around, stirred by the depths of his feelings; then continued: "I'll have lots of money, Zelma, when I sell this bed of shell—there's tons and tons of it. And we could come back here—"

"I'd die first!" cried the girl, coming to her feet, her eyes filled with a great terror, a breathless, loathing disgust.

"You certainly will die," he told her with a sudden, furious vehemence, "if you try anything desperate! If you go overboard, the sharks will get you or you'll drown; if you try running away here, the snakes will get you or you'll starve to death—or worse—if there's natives—"

The girl cried out sharply.

"Please!" she begged. "Please! You have your better moments—*please* let me go! See—here on my knees, I beg of you! I swear that I shall kill myself before I'll accept either—"

"You won't get the chance!" he interrupted darkly. "I'll watch you pretty closely! And you'll either do as I want you to—or, by God, I'll take you back to Moy Song and let him work his will with you! That will be worse for you—but I'll get my money! I'm damned if I'll let you

cheat me out of both! Either I get you—or I'll get the money for you, and turn you over to that yellow reptile.

"Now, come along, Zelma, you've got to go back on board. Don't force me to tie you up! We'll be here for some time, and if you behave, I'll let you come ashore every day for a while. I'm not going to rush you—you can think it over as long as we stay here—but when the shell's on board—I want my answer. That's all the time you have to think about it—and, by God, it's more than any other man in the world would give you! Come along now—don't make any useless fuss—you've got to go aboard."

Bob held himself in check only with intense difficulty. White as chalk, his restraint slipping, he watched them get into the longboat, after which several Kanakas rowed them out to the ship.

The girl's sobs made no impression upon the depraved natives, nor, apparently, upon the other white man. For a week, seemingly, until all the shell was on board, she was safe—unless driven hard, she might destroy herself. Bob began to plan, though his white-heat anger handicapped him. Something must be done—but what? He had already irrevocably committed himself to action on her behalf—but there was Paul and Ada—they must be thought of, too.

It would soon be dark. He suddenly remembered that he had promised to be back early. He must do nothing to jeopardize their safety; they, too, must be considered as well as the girl, though her cause pulled at his heart strings with paining fingers.

He made his way back to the jungle, and once out of sight of those on the beach, lost no time in crossing the island. It was dusk when he stepped out upon the beach and saw the Hawk sailing back and forth across the little bay.

Paul must have been watching sharply, for his signal was answered instantly. The Hawk swung at once to her former anchorage and dropped anchor. Paul came for him in the tender.

Seated upon the deck he told them swiftly what he had seen and heard.

"But," he wound up, "it's my affair, and

I can't allow it to jeopardize *your* safety. I have no right to include you in the risk of getting her away. So, here's what I propose: you and Ada clear out and leave me enough ammunition and food for a week—"

Then Paul exploded and Ada raised her hand in interruption.

"Look here!" cried Paul. "Do you think—"

"Bob," interrupted Ada, placing her hand on his arm, "we can't leave without some attempt to release her—what else have you in mind—anything?"

"This is simply fine of both of you," Bob answered. "But I can't allow—"

"Fool!" cried Paul in exasperation.

"Don't talk nonsense! We won't leave you—it's out of the question! Why, you'd die here! Why don't you watch until you get an opportunity to talk to the girl? If you could get her into the bush with an hour or two's start, she could board the Hawk and we'd be gone before they could round the island to give chase—"

"And," eagerly interrupted Ada, "the Hawk can show a clean pair of heels to anything like a trader—she's fast! We must try to help that girl."

"Perhaps," suggested Bob suddenly, "I could buy her release with some of our jewels? The man looks and talks like an avaricious cur who would sell anything at a price!"

"Perhaps," agreed Ada; but Paul shook his head.

"You wouldn't succeed," he declared. "You don't know the caliber of some of the traders of these waters. He'd take your jewels and the girl, too—and perhaps your life in the bargain, so you would never be able to tell what you know!"

Then, for some minutes they sat in a palpitant silence.

"I'll go back there every day," Bob said firmly. "I'll make an opportunity to talk to her and effect her escape into the bush somehow. If I can manage to get several hours' start, I'll bring her aboard and we'll be gone before he can round the island to give chase. If not, I'll take my chances of buying her release with my share of the find—now, don't interrupt me—I'll not budge an inch, I tell you!

"In the meanwhile I'll dismount the jewels in the vase we have—bait and proof of greater quantities in exchange for the girl—if it becomes necessary and the chance offers. We'll go right now and divide the vases and coins. You'll take your half and I'll bury my half in several places. Your half will be on board, so you can pull out at any minute.

"Every day you'll stand off and on the island, ready to put to sea if I show up alone with the girl. If I fail to come back for two days, then as you value Ada's life, put to sea and leave this island. I'll manage somehow—"

"But, look here—" began Paul, in heated protest.

"That's all there is to it, old friend," Bob interrupted grimly, facing Paul. "It's that—or I stay alone."

No amount of entreaty could move him from his decision.

They unmounted a dozen large, rose-cut diamonds, sapphires and rubies from the vase. Bob concealed these in the waistband of his trousers. Then they sailed the Hawk to the cove, where the ancient wreck lay, and the treasure was divided. Bob buried his share, while Ada made a map of its location, and wrote out latitude and longitude of the island. This map she kept, at Bob's request, after he had memorized the necessary numbers.

"I can remember it," he assured her. "It's best that I don't carry it with me. One can never tell what may happen, you know."

Later, when they sat upon deck in a friendly silence, after even Paul had ceased his attempts to dissuade Bob from his course, Ada suddenly asked Bob:

"Is she—beautiful, Bob?"

"The most beautiful thing I ever saw on God's earth!" he answered swiftly, without any hesitation. He realized that this girl had impressed him out of all proportion to what he knew of her; yet a swift analysis disclosed to him that the entire chemistry of his being longed for this one girl. It was startling; he tried to disbelieve it. As well try to turn the stars from their courses! It suddenly became the one looming, most firmly fixed fact in his life.

"Ah!" breathed the vivacious Paul, softly. He was French, and real French blood runs richly in the understanding of love. "How strange it is! We see a million faces, we hear a million voices; we meet a million women and they do not touch us. Then—we see one, and—" He stopped and glanced affectionately at Ada. "Still," he continued, "it is not so strange, after all—the heart knows!"

They slept on board that night. Next morning, early, Bob picked up his rifle, extra cartridges, glasses, some food, and went ashore.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DASH FOR SAFETY.

THE cool, early morning freshness of the tropics greeted him. A sudden compelling excitement, once he had actually embarked upon his adventure, urged him on faster and faster.

He crossed the island with greater speed this morning, but when he neared the beach on the opposite side, he slowed down cautiously.

Creeping to his former vantage-point on the ledge, his rifle and glasses beside him, he saw that the Kanakas were already at work loading pearl shell. There was no sign of the white men or the girl. For several hours he lay in the sun, thinking, wondering, evolving plan after plan, executing maneuvers, pondering on how to get the girl away without being noticed. It never occurred to him that perhaps the opportunity might not arise. He had definitely committed himself to rescue her—at the point of his rifle, if need be!

At about ten o'clock the dark man who had shot the pigeons on the previous day came ashore. He carried his shotgun, and after giving some orders to the Kanakas, walked up the beach, evidently bound upon further depredation on the island's flocks. Bob rightly guessed that the pigeons were intended as tid-bits for the captain's table. Hour after hour he lay, but there was no sign of the captain or the girl. He began to grow apprehensive. Was she going to stay upon the ship? Had something oc-

curred? He caught his breath as sinister possibilities passed through his mind.

The pigeon hunter at length returned with a good bag of the birds and was rowed to the ship.

"I could pick off the Kanakas one by one," Bob thought savagely, "force them to come ashore to investigate, then pick them all off." But he had put this thought away. "It might do as a last resort, but I couldn't storm the ship," he decided. "Unless—I swam out at night and caught them unaware."

About two o'clock a signal flashed from the ship, and several Kanakas jumped into the longboat and rowed out to her. Using his glasses, Bob made out the captain and the girl coming ashore. A thrill ran through him—the old thrill of excitement, always sweet to him.

The longboat was pulled up on the beach. The girl leaped lightly to a dry footing, disdaining the proffered hand of the captain. Bob watched her approach the stone beneath him with a curious, muffled drumming in his heart and ears. She was far more beautiful than he had dreamed. Seemingly she was calm and oblivious of all her surroundings. The captain lounged after her, confident, smiling.

"Now, be careful," he heard the captain warn her. "Don't go too near the jungle. My mate reports many large snakes. I have no doubt but what the island is inhabited; most of them are—and some of the natives have a pleasant little way of saving white heads to put on sticks around the village. If you don't behave, you can't come again."

The girl looked at him with a cold scorn, a contemptuous disdain that apparently penetrated his armor of braggadocio. He flushed slightly under the level, luminous regard.

"There's plenty to interest you right here," he went on, with a species of defiance. "Watch those parrots or pigeons. I will stroll down and see if any more pearls were found. I'm treating you decently, Zelma—giving you a pretty free hand—so don't make any foolish attempts to escape. You can't do it. You'd be caught in ten minutes."

As Zelma surveyed the tropical jungle it looked hopeless indeed. She made no reply. She sat looking out to sea, her eyes swimming in a haze of tears. In her dauntless little heart the resolution was already born to take the chance—rather to die in the jungle than to risk further proximity with the hulking captain.

Bob began to make his way slowly and noiselessly back toward the jungle. Blood racing in every pulse, the saline taste of excitement in his mouth, he checked his usual desire to whistle aimlessly as was his habit when under intense strain. In the trenches in France he had caught himself doing this and had smiled. The zero hour was coming now again.

He crept toward her, keeping a clump of foliage between himself and the occupants of the beach. At length he was as near as he dared go.

Then he raised his head just a trifle above the ferns and grasses. She was still gazing out to sea. The look in her great, violet eyes bruised his heart. The others were a good fifty yards away. He knew her name, so he raised his head and called softly:

"Zelma! A friend! Don't scream or talk!"

He saw the blood go from her face, while a tremor raced through the slim body. She sat quite still, but her hands clutched at her parasol until the knuckles shone white through the skin.

"I'm here to help you get away," he went on very quietly. "My friend and his wife are on the other side of the island. You will be safe with her. I heard your story by accident yesterday, and came back to help you. Don't be afraid, please. You can trust me."

The girl glanced swiftly at the captain and the Kanakas. They were examining pearls and were deeply engrossed. With an unhurried movement she shifted her position and looked into Bob's face.

He saw the amazement, the wild hope, the incredulous joy that shone in her eyes at the possibility of release from her intolerable situation. What she saw in Bob's face evidently reassured her. She nodded her head slightly. It was too bizarre! But

what had she to lose? she thought. Anything rather than the captain or—Macao. She shuddered, while the tumult of her pulses constricted her throat.

"Walk to the water's edge," instructed Bob softly. "Put up your parasol. Pick up shells and throw them into the water. Saunter up the beach slowly—take your time. I'll keep pace in the woods. When you get to that tongue of palms, run into the woods. I'll be there."

He crept back into the underbrush and examined his rifle. It was full. He was ready now for whatever might come. He watched her as she obeyed his instructions—the careless grace of her walk; the calm, imperturbable manner. By no sign did she show the nervous strain under which she must be laboring.

"Little thoroughbred!" Bob told his soul in intense admiration.

Captain Montozzi watched her, too, as she picked up shells, examined them, and threw them into the sea. She sauntered up the beach aimlessly.

He smiled. She would turn out sensible after all. After the first outbreak they all came to their senses sooner or later. He let her walk. He could see up the beach fully a mile. He never dreamed she'd take to the jungle. Even escape meant death, and he couldn't believe that any woman would prefer death to safety—no matter what species of safety it was. As for that talk about killing herself first, that was all melodrama. They all said that. He smiled again.

But when Zelma came to the palms Bob had indicated she slipped into the brush and looked around.

"This way," called Bob, at her side in a moment.

She started, hesitated, and examined his face briefly.

"Don't be afraid," he assured her. "You can trust me."

She nodded.

They ran swiftly inland, but before they had covered a hundred yards they heard cries from the beach and the sounds of the captain and the Kanakas taking to the woods.

The captain had missed her.

"Keep going straight ahead," whispered Bob. "I'll cover the rear. Go as fast as you can, please."

CHAPTER IX.

A DEAL IN DIAMONDS.

FOR half a mile the girl made swift progress. After that her pace grew slower. She staggered once or twice, and her breath came in short, sharp spasms. Bob swore silently as he saw her strength and wind ebbing toward exhaustion. His jaw set grimly, tensely.

The Kanakas had evidently spread out in a circle in his rear and were beating forward rapidly—keeping pace with them. He could hear the captain's furious shouts of command.

The girl stopped and leaned against a tree. She had no breath even for words, but her great, eloquent eyes looked up at him as if to tell him that she had done her best. She pointed to the jungle and finally gasped:

"He—he—doesn't know about you—yet. Go—and leave—me! He'll—kill—you! I'll find another opportunity—"

For answer she received a vicious grumble as Bob swept her up in his arms and ran with her through the dense underbrush. She lay in his arms like a thing bereft of life, only her eyes looking up at him with a species of wonder.

It was harrowing, hot work. Crossing an open, parklike space, a Kanaka saw him, and shouted his discovery to the others. The hue and cry redoubled; a bullet suddenly sang over Bob's head, then another and another.

This was becoming dangerous. The next bullet might strike him or the girl. He determined to fight it out. Dodging behind a boulder, he set Zelma down and swung his rifle to bear upon the dodging, leaping forms in front of him. Before he could pull the trigger another shot rang out.

The bullet struck the boulder to one side of him. The nickel-jacketed slug chipped a piece of stone, which struck him above the eye and sent him reeling. He dropped his rifle, striving to keep his whirling facul-

ties. The blood began to run down into his eyes, and he felt a pair of arms grasp him from behind.

Employing an old trick, he seized the Kanaka by the back of the neck and threw him over his shoulder; another Kanaka in front went down with a hard, straight blow; but it was useless. He couldn't see; his head was whirling, and other arms fastened upon him. He struggled hard, but all at once he felt the curious, soundless crash of his senses, and he knew no more.

When he regained consciousness he was firmly bound and several Kanakas stood about him. Captain Montozzi watched him with venomous eyes. Bob noted that Zelma, too, was bound and was sitting upon a stone, her eyes fixed upon his face. It had been a hopeless effort! They were caught! He looked at the girl with a white, still anguish that searched and found her heart.

"Who are you?" demanded the captain with vivid oaths.

Bob glanced at the girl in great mortification. Montozzi followed his glance, and had the grace to redden.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded. "Who are you?"

Bob did not answer directly. He felt faint and sick. He tried a different tack.

"If you don't release us," he answered, "you'll soon find out! I've enough men here to wipe you and your crew off the map. Untie me!"

The captain glanced around swiftly and smiled.

"Not right away!" he answered sarcastically. "I'll take a chance."

He turned to several of the watching crew and issued several orders. They wheeled into the jungle and were gone.

"I'll soon find out about your men," he went on. "In the meantime we'll cross to the other side of the island. There's no ship on our side, so I'll have a look at the other side. Perhaps I'll find out where you came from. As for me, I think you're a beach comber, and so's you won't get into mischief I'll hang onto you for a while. Get up!"

Montozzi picked up Bob's rifle and examined it.

"Martini-Henry, eh?" he said. "You're an Englishman, aren't you? While I'm at it I'll see what else you have. Might have a knife in your pockets."

He searched Bob's pockets, but found no identification of any kind. Then he calmly confiscated the entire contents. Bob said nothing. He was fearful that Montozzi would discover his jewels, but the captain overlooked them, not thinking to look in the lining of his trousers.

"Now, get up!" rasped the captain. "March!"

As they neared the beach a Kanaka came bounding toward them and said something to the captain.

Montozzi grinned. "Little bluff didn't work!" he said to Bob. "My man tells me there's only a little single-master ratcheting off and on the coast."

Bob bit his lip with a new dread. He was bringing danger to Paul and Ada. In some way he must contrive to warn them.

A few minutes later they came out on the beach, and Bob saw the Hawk plying across the bay. She altered her course slightly, and a white object waved upon her deck. They had seen him. That meant that they had seen the others also.

Without thought of his own safety he suddenly sprinted forward and ran into the water up to his knees; then, with all the power of his lungs, he shouted: "Get away, Paul—get away—"

That was as far as he went, for Montozzi was right behind him and dragged him out of the water bodily.

"Damn you!" he cried savagely as Bob struggled to keep his feet. "I'll show you and your interfering—"

A shot sounded from the Hawk, and she swung about in her course. The captain looked up and immediately ordered his crew back into the brush, where he also pulled Bob.

"I'll show you!" he fumed, an intense malignity, a brutal, vengeful lust blazing in his cruel face and echoing in his voice. "I'll show you how I'll deal with your crowd!"

He issued an order to a slim Kanaka, who left immediately.

"By the time we get back to my ship."

he said, "she'll be ready to sail. I'm going to overhaul that boat of yours and sink her; then I'll attend to you! March in front and head back to where we came from. If you make the slightest break to get away I'll fill you full of lead!"

Bob looked him in the eyes with a level steadiness.

"That won't do you a bit of good," he answered calmly. "You'll never catch the Hawk, and her people know that you've kidnaped this young lady and that you're bound for Macao to turn her over to Moy Song. They'll make it hot for you if you don't release the girl and myself."

"How the devil did you know that?" queried the captain, astonished.

"Never mind how," answered Bob, his voice cold. "Better consider carefully what you do—or it may go hard with you. They know you've got me, and you'll have to answer to the authorities for your actions. Every port in the world will be watched for you."

Montozzi's eyes narrowed.

"Maybe," he said slowly, "and maybe not. I'm not the sort to be bluffed. If I sink your boat, no one will be any the wiser. Haven't thought of that, have you? Go ahead now—walk!"

During the walk across the narrow island Bob's mind ran in a strange confusion. His head hurt fearfully where the stone had struck. Despite his high-sounding phrases, he was apprehensive for Paul and Ada. If they only would leave at once, they might get away; if they hung around, hoping against hope to help him out of his difficulty, the trader would surely sink them. Bob saw only too well that Montozzi was a man who hesitated at nothing in the calendar of crime, especially if his own safety demanded drastic action.

Arriving at the beach, they were taken on board the Water Queen. Zelma was sent to her cabin and locked in, while Bob was allowed to remain on deck.

"Now I'll show you what I'll do!" grinned Montozzi evilly, as the ship gathered speed and stood out to sea. "These are unfrequented waters—no one will know or see. I'll teach you inquisitive English to come interfering! Just sit here and have

the pleasure of seeing your friend's boat splintered!"

The Water Queen gathered speed and began to weather the island. Bob sat in a haze of disconnected thought. His head hurt badly. Trussed up as he was, he could do nothing. He wondered where Zelma was, where it would all lead to, and what Montozzi would do with him. Then an electric flicker came to his eyes, and he began his aimless, tuneless whistling. As they rounded the island he saw the little Hawk ahead standing out to sea. Montozzi stood near him, watching her through his glasses.

"A woman at the wheel!" he exclaimed. "So that's your gang of men, eh?" He laughed sarcastically.

Bob's breath came faster as he saw that the Hawk was holding its own. Ada was an expert sailor, and the Hawk was fast. Perhaps—

The sun was setting in a red haze, and if the Hawk could hold out until night she might slip away in the darkness. The wind was good—two points aft the beam, steady and strong.

Montozzi, too, must have thought of the approaching night, for he ordered the top-galls'ls and the inner and outer jibs shaken out. They had been running under mains'ls, forestays'l, fores'l and jib. Now the Water Queen forged ahead and carried a "bone in her teeth" as she raced along.

The Hawk was too far away for Bob to be able to see much, but he did note that the distance between the two ships did not decrease.

"More canvas!" yelled the irate Montozzi to the Portuguese mate. "They'll get away in the dark." He glowered at the Hawk fiercely and swore. "Damn them! If I had a gun on board I'd sink them quick. It's too far for rifle fire."

"Eleven knots by the log, sir!" called the mate.

"Haul out the spinnaker boom!" yelled Montozzi. "Haul her off a point or two and take the full wind. We must catch them. Move! Jump to it! Get busy!" He turned to Bob. "Who are those people?" he demanded. "You'd better talk, or I'll make it damned worse for you!"

Bob didn't answer, but looked Montozzi over contemptuously. He noted that the Water Queen was racing along with all her canvas set, and yet she gained nothing on the little flying Hawk.

The race thrilled him. Far ahead he saw the Hawk leisurely dancing away. It gradually became apparent that the Water Queen couldn't overtake her.

Montozzi swore with a vitriolic fury as darkness came, and a faint, unilluminating moon shone upon the waters. Finally they lost the Hawk altogether. Bob breathed a sigh of intense relief. Ada and Paul were safe—thanks to Ada's stanch seamanship and the speed of the Hawk. The hopelessness of the chase became evident to even the dogged, persistent Montozzi.

"Get up!" he ordered curtly. "Come along with me. I want to talk to you—and you'd better talk, or I'll—"

He didn't finish the threat, but his voice carried a deadly menace. In Montozzi's brain a doubt was forming. If the people on the little Hawk knew of Zelma's abduction, knew of his destination and the name of Moy Song, they could cause him trouble. Had he been able to catch them, things would have been different.

He did not know, of course, that the people on the Hawk were fugitives and would not dare enlist the aid of any authorities. He gave the mate some orders in a low tone, then motioned Bob into his cabin. Here he lit a pipe and turned to Bob.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "And what were you doing on that island?"

Bob concluded that silence was golden. He did not answer, but he smiled in a tantalizing manner at the captain; then he stared at the wall in rapt attention. He rightly guessed that silence would confuse Montozzi.

It did. Montozzi exhibited signs of nervousness. For nearly an hour he tried to obtain some information from Bob—from what source he had obtained Moy Song's name—but Bob kept silent. It finally infuriated the hot-tempered Italian.

"By God," he cried, "you'll talk, or I'll pull your tongue out by the roots!"

A new thought came to Bob. He turned to Montozzi and said in a quiet voice:

"Take it easy and sit down. I've a proposition to make to you."

"Yes—I suppose you have—"

"Keep quiet and listen to me," interrupted Bob coolly. "I have the power to cause you a great deal of trouble, and it depends upon you whether I do or not. Remember that. My friends know I'm here. They saw me. They know who you are, why you are here, and your destination with the girl."

"Even if you don't go to Macao, you'll never be able to put into any other port. They'll all be watched for you. What good would it do you to kill me?"

The captain eyed him sharply. "Well?" he asked.

"Now," went on Bob, "let's talk business. Unfasten my hands, and I'll tell you something that'll make you happy and give you immunity."

Montozzi laid an automatic pistol on the table and cut Bob's hands loose.

"Try anything," he said, indicating the pistol, "and I'll drill you—quick!"

In answer to the threat Bob smiled pleasantly and nodded.

"Forget it," he said easily. "The Fourth of July is over—put the cannon away! I'm trying to talk business. Be sensible. Give me a smoke and I'll explain."

Curious, admiring the nonchalance of the younger man, though puzzled and worried by it, Montozzi obeyed. When Bob's cigarette was going, he turned and began:

"You want money, don't you?"

"Naturally," Montozzi sneered. "We all do. What of it?"

"This," replied Bob. "You're bringing Zelma to Moy Song for a price? Well, will you deliver her to me, give us both our freedom, unharmed, if I gave you—one hundred times as much? And in the bargain agreed that no harm would come to you from the authorities because of your acts?"

"That's fine talk!" Montozzi sneered. "I might be agreeable—but where is this money to come from?"

"Like this," went on Bob, pulling the great jewels from his trouser's linings and spreading them on the table.

They blinked and glittered wickedly in the light of the hanging lantern. Montozzi gasped. He seized and examined one after another.

"The diamonds are good!" he exclaimed. "But these"—he shoved the great rubies and sapphires across the table—"I don't know anything about—don't want them. Where did you get this?"

"All in good time," replied Bob. "Now, those diamonds you have in your hand would alone make you wealthy. Suppose I told you that I'd give you twenty or thirty more like it—if you'll agree to my terms?"

Montozzi's eyes glittered with the avarice of a Harpagon.

"You have them here?" he asked.

"No," said Bob, smiling; "this is all I have here, but I'll give you the location of the balance—after Zelma and myself are put ashore."

The captain grinned.

"I have these now," he said, "and the twenty or thirty others may be just bluff! Now I have this and Zelma, too. You—"

"Listen! The others are in a safe place. These are only as an evidence of good faith. Examine the stones. You see that they are rose-cut? That's the way they were cut hundreds of years ago."

Montozzi looked and nodded.

"I'm going to tell you a story," went on Bob. "I and my friends found the hull of an old Spanish ship. There were dozens of vases on her, all studded with stones such as I have here. My friends have their half of the treasure safe. My share is buried in a certain spot. If you'll set Zelma and me ashore in some port, I'll give you the location, and you can go and get them. There's enough to make you very wealthy, even in these days of great fortunes. I'll get in touch with my friends, assure them that both I and the girl are safe—so there'll be no trouble for you. Now, all I want is these red and blue stones; you can keep all the rest. There are over fifty more. What do you say?"

A dewy perspiration began to stand out upon Montozzi's brow. This was wealth—real wealth! If this tale was true—and he held some evidence in his hands to support

its veracity—he would be rich beyond his fondest dreams! A canny idea began to dawn in his crooked brain.

He shook himself and eyed Bob.

"How could I explain to Moy Song?" he asked. "He's a hard man and very powerful."

"You won't ever need him again," replied Bob. "You'll be far richer—and, consequently, more powerful. Or, you can say the girl wouldn't come. Tell him whatever you choose!"

"Yes—I suppose that would be easy enough. Where is the balance of the stones—on the island?"

"No," lied Bob calmly. "It's on a small island we found—about three hundred miles away. I'll give you the exact latitude and longitude when you fulfill your end of the bargain."

"All right!" exclaimed the captain suddenly. "I'll do it! I'll take the chance!"

"Good!" said Bob. "Now, if you'll free Zelma, treat us decently on the trip, and put us off at Manila or Hongkong, you'll have wealth that few people ever even dream about!"

"And you're willing to part with all this—for a girl?" asked Montozzi curiously. "It's a high price to pay. I like a good-looking girl myself—but not at such a price." He laughed unpleasantly. "I suppose you're in love with her, eh?"

"That's my affair," Bob answered quietly, though his cheeks burned at the captain's careless speech.

The captain shrugged, a cynical smile upon his lips.

"All right—it's a bargain!" he repeated. "I'll put you off at Hongkong; then I'll go on to Macao and have a little talk with Moy Song. After that, I'll go after the balance of this."

He tapped the big diamonds.

"Will you please release Zelma now?" requested Bob. "Treat us as passengers for the voyage. I'm paying you high, captain. Be something of a sport—and play square!"

Montozzi put his diamonds into his pocket, picked up his pistol, and lit his pipe.

"I will," he answered. "See that you do. I'll give you a bunk forward. I'll let

the girl out now, too. I'm going to let you have the run of the ship. So behave—don't do anything rash."

"What could I do?" asked Bob, shrugging. "I'm on your ship, and you're twenty to my one. I have no arms—"

"And you're not likely to get any," interrupted the captain. "Well, I'll have the cook give you something to eat."

He walked out.

A sigh of unmistakable relief escaped Bob. No price was too high that would give him and Zelma freedom. He swept the dazzling pigeon-blood rubies and the azure sapphires into his pocket and smiled. The captain didn't want and didn't understand the colored stones. They would give him plenty to gain a fresh start. That was all he wanted.

Montozzi walked forward in deep thought. After all, he reflected, with this deal in effect, he wouldn't have to watch them during the voyage. They would behave and not give him any trouble. Later—He smiled darkly. He knew what he had to do.

CHAPTER X.

TREACHERY!

FOR the two young people there followed blissful days during the voyage as the Water Queen skimmed over the wind-tossed tropic seas.

Bob did not tell Zelma of his hard bargain with Montozzi, or the price he was paying for their liberty. He simply told her that he had arranged to buy their liberty for a few precious stones that he had for some time. Nor did he tell her how he had happened to come to the island or to that part of the world. She didn't ask.

She was not sophisticated enough to be very curious. Like Miranda on her isle, she had lived upon Norfolk Island, far removed from the everyday world. All she knew was that this young man had saved her from a horror which she herself did not fully grasp; and her heart went out to him.

She had read much, true, but she had lived, as far as all love went, as untouched as any mountain flower. The breath of

passing love fancies, which dulls the mirror of so many women's souls, had never passed over her.

Led both by nature and inclination to seek the treasures of scholarship, she had lost herself in the immeasurable majesties of thought. She found an all-absorbing happiness in the myths of heroic ages; in the delicate intricacies of language; in the meditations of great minds. The evil inseparable from all knowledge passed her unfelt, for a young girl can lose herself in abstract, impersonal pursuits far more successfully than a youth.

Several men had wooed her, some with passion, for her beauty was great. But a thousand rejected wooers teach a woman nothing.

When Bob came into her life her first love entered her heart. A whirlwind of feeling transformed the pale narcissus into a passiflora with a heart of fire. She gave him, unstintingly, all the warm treasures of love in her heart, as she would have given him the kingdoms of earth, had she had them.

As for Bob, who had long lost the ideals and illusions of boyhood, he found again the happiness of cherished ideals; her subtle and potent allure made his standards inadequate. She was his ideal come true—and more.

She brought again to him the old chivalries, the pretty sentimental fantasies that he once associated with femininity—the spring-tide of the year; the breath of early flowers; the verses of the old, dead poets; the sweet scent of summer rains. She brought an aura of peace and purity, patience and pity, sacrifice and sorrow, high standards and sanctity.

He had always pictured a pal and a sweetheart; he was an Epicurean who desired to carry into the one passion in his life the fires of the senses and the coldness of philosophy.

They spent the days together with a vivid pleasure, finding heaven in each other's eyes. Love came to them as dreamily, as exquisitely as a stirring melody heard over evening waters.

And with the coming of love Zelma's beauty became clamorous, a thing to marvel

over. Montozzi, who kept much to himself, stared at her occasionally with eyes that smoldered like live coals. Then he would shake his head and smile cryptically.

It was the tail-end of a hurricane that forced a climax. The Water Queen struck only the side of the typhoon. As the ship began to pitch and roll, the girl had looked at Bob with some apprehension; later, in the full fury of the storm, when the artillery of the heavens rumbled and flashed glaringly, she crept into his arms and he held her close. Then for the first time he kissed her.

The storm was as brief as it was furious. The sun came out again, the wet decks steamed. Then he told her all his history and of his arrest and imprisonment. She cooed over him with all a mother's tenderness and a sweetheart's consolation.

They would be married in Hongkong, they decided, then they'd go back to the States, where Bob would clear his name. He never expected to see Paul and Ada again; he didn't see how it was possible. He never expected to see the island again, as he intended playing fair and giving Montozzi the correct location of his half of the treasure.

They planned their future with the enthusiasm and wonder and high hopes that are the heritage of youth, and grew silent at times with the marvel of life.

And the gods of the open sky must have sat back and laughed, for well they knew the stormy seas that lay ahead!

Montozzi watched them occasionally and grunted. He had been friendly during the voyage; toward Zelma, even somewhat contrite. Bob did not altogether trust the swarthy Italian, but there was little he could do. He counted upon Montozzi's avarice to insure them safety. But he did not know the crafty brain behind the inscrutable eyes.

He was awakened one night by some one pawing over him. He sat up, to find his hands tied. Montozzi and several Kanakas stood over him, the captain grinning like an evil tomat.

"What's this?" cried Bob. "What's the idea—"

"I'll tell you, Mr. Smart Englishman!"

interjected Montozzi. "I'm taking Zelma ashore, where she'll be safe. Then you and I will *both* go and get the balance of those stones! I don't trust you! If you've lied to me—Heaven help you, that's all! If not, I'll bring you back and you can go to your Zelma then. That's all—only you'll stay here under guard until I get ready to sail.

"If you try to get away the guard will shoot— Oh, no—not to kill—just to wound! You're valuable to me until I get the balance of the stones, but"—he leered meaningly—"if you're a wise young man, you won't risk too many wounds—understand? It wouldn't be nice to have your arms and legs shot-pierced, would it?"

Bob made a terrific effort to break the cords that held him, but a useless one. He finally lay exhausted while Montozzi laughed.

"Stop it and be sensible," he suggested. "You'll simply have to play this game my way, so make up your mind to it. We'll be on our way again in a week or so."

He gave the Kanaka, who was to guard Bob, some instructions in a strange tongue, and handed him an old-fashioned, large-calibered pistol. The Kanaka nodded understandingly. Then Montozzi left.

Bob managed to get his face near the port. He made out a palm-fringed shore in the bright moonlight. He heard some one say: "Macao"; then the Kanaka motioned him away from the window.

CHAPTER XI.

MOY SONG'S PRISONER.

ZELMA was awakened by Montozzi's knock upon her cabin door.

"Get up," he called, "and dress! We're in port, and I'm taking you and Bob ashore while it's dark—for good reasons! Bob thinks it best."

She dressed swiftly, her heart aflame with excitement. No shadow of suspicion dawned upon her until she opened the door, and Montozzi and two Kanakas stepped inside, one guarding the door. The other seized her hands and tied them behind her, while Montozzi held her.

"Sit down," he said when she was tied.

Bewildered, her eyes shining like rain-washed stars, the girl obeyed.

"I'm taking you ashore," Montozzi continued evenly, his face contorted with a huge amazement; "and you're going to Moy Song—"

The girl cried out as if struck a physical blow.

"Noise won't help you," observed Montozzi. "Better not attempt it, or I'll muzzle you! Besides, it's three in the morning and we're a mile from shore! Now, my friend, I'm going to collect for you from Moy Song as I originally intended—and you'll find he's not quite as easy as I was!"

"You—infamous beast!" said Zelma quietly, with unutterable scorn in her voice and eyes. "You—you traitor! I'll tell Moy Song everything—even a Chinaman can't be as contemptible—"

"That will be about all," interjected Montozzi in a dangerous voice. "Be careful what you say! As for telling Moy Song, you'll not say a word, except that you had a very pleasant trip; and you'll mention nothing at all that happened—not even a word about Bob—or I'll slit your lover's throat the minute you do! Understand?"

"Your father died as I told you, but you'll ask for him when you see Moy Song—you know nothing, understand? You're no fool—you know what I expect of you. If you love Bob, do as I instruct and I'll turn him loose at the end of *our* cruise. Now, get up! I'm going to remove the cords, and we'll get started."

Her brain reeling, weighed down by a new terror, the girl obeyed. Bob's life was dearer to her than her own. She would have gladly laid down her life that he might live.

They rowed far to the left of the bay, where the circle of lights around the Bund ended. By devious dark streets, she was finally ushered into a darker house, whence at length she was led into a room brilliant with electric light.

It was a richly furnished room, with oriental hangings and rugs, vases and curios, teakwood furniture inlaid with mother-of-pearl and odd pictures. When her eyes grew to its brilliance, she saw a crafty-look-

ing Chinaman of indefinite age regarding her. The scrutiny contained so much of suppressed, veiled cruelty and sensualism that the girl dropped her eyes.

Her clean, unerring instinct instantly told her that this bland Chinaman was far more to be dreaded than the openly rough and piratical Montozzi. She shuddered.

Montozzi came forward and smiled.

"This is Captain Forsythe's daughter, Zelma," he said to Moy Song, by way of introduction. "We just arrived."

"So?" replied Moy Song, coming closer and eying her in a manner that somehow seemed to be an invasion upon her privacy. The girl's blood chilled.

"My—father?" she murmured, mindful of Bob, for Montozzi's eyes were upon her meaningly. Every drop of blood had faded from her lips and cheeks.

"Ah, yes," purred Moy Song. "He has gone to Fusan for a cargo of furs. He will be back in a few weeks and you shall see him. In the meanwhile, it is his wish that you wait for him here—as my guest. Have you had a nice trip?"

She nodded.

"So? Very good! Now, you must be tired. Best go to your room and rest." He clapped his hands, and a Chinese servant came to the door. Moy Song gave him an order and accompanied Zelma as she walked from the room. The slender, supple form of the girl dropped like a bruised lily between the shambling masculine figures on each side of her.

The Chinese servant opened the door of a room, and Zelma entered. The others remained outside. It was a finely furnished chamber in exquisite taste, but the girl shuddered and stood looking around in uncertainty.

Moy Song smiled slightly.

"If you wish anything," he said, "clap your hands for the servant. We shall talk in the morning. You must be tired. Good night."

He closed the door. The girl flew to it like a freshly caged leopard. It was locked tight. Examining the windows, she found great iron shutters over them. Ventilation came through an iron grate in the high ceiling.

Helpless! The word came to her as she looked about. She gasped audibly. After all, she was but a child, and this was her first experience and contact with the outside world. The bands of pain at her heart pressed a great sob to her throat and she wept bitterly.

Thereafter she sat day after day doing nothing, or pacing the room with the feverish impetuosity of some wild forest thing deprived of liberty. For the first time in her life her hours were empty; came without welcome, departed without use. Heretofore, the full, rich, studious days had always seemed so short; now the hours dragged with bitter pangs and revolting fears.

As for Moy Song, he motioned Montozzi back into the gorgeous study and poured a glass of wine for both of them. They selected cigars, drank, and sat down.

Moy Song opened a drawer of his huge teakwood desk and counted out some bank notes. Montozzi's eyes sparkled with greed.

"There!" said Moy Song. "Is that right?"

Montozzi nodded, counted the notes and shoved them into his pocket. All things seemed to be coming his way. He was at peace with all the world and highly in love with his own cunning.

"Had a fine trip," he was saying. "Only stopped once—to get some fresh water. Had a leak in our casks. Young lady enjoyed it very much. Wonderful looking girl, Song, isn't she?"

The Chinaman's inscrutable eyes rested upon him for a brief moment.

"Very," he answered quietly. "Much more so than her photograph led me to expect."

Montozzi laughed, a curious light in his eyes. He had his own little plans of which Moy Song was not aware. He'd show the Chinaman a thing or two about *real* craft when the time came!

They drank more wine; then Montozzi became a bit noisy. Moy Song filled still another glass of wine. As he held it, his great, green-jade ring opened and a tiny amount of powder fell into the glass. This he pressed upon Montozzi, and took a glass himself.

Both drank. Both were gay. Montozzi, however, suddenly sagged in his seat and slipped to the floor.

With no undue hurry, Moy Song searched the unconscious man methodically, confiscated the money he had just paid out, dropped all the contents into his desk drawer, and then turned the captain over with an elegantly shod foot.

"Quite dead," he murmured calmly. "The pollen of the death flower has lost none of its potency. What a gross pig he was! I wonder what happened on the trip. The girl was frightened to death. I'll question the mate later—when he least expects it. Something is wrong. This pig knew too much, anyway."

He clapped his hands sharply.

Two furtive Chinamen stepped, seemingly, out of the wall.

Moy Song pointed to Montozzi, issued a low order, and raised his eyebrows with a faint smile. The two grinned understandingly, lifted the great body, took it through the panel in the wall, and disappeared. That was the last the world ever saw of Captain Montozzi.

Moy Song lit a fresh cigarette and walked toward Zelma's door. Here he listened intently for a moment, then made a sign to the Chinaman who sat there, apparently watching. The servant nodded.

Moy Song let himself through several doors and a long hall into another part of the house. Here he knocked upon still another door and entered.

The White Lily, clad in silken coat and trousers, sat by the open window smoking. She glanced at him briefly; then stared out at the sky.

"Not sleeping?" he queried.

"No," she answered shortly. "I can't sleep."

He eyed her comprehensively; noted the dark circles under her eyes, her fading beauty. Moy's eyebrows lifted in derisive contempt. He pulled a roll of bills from his pocket and threw them in her lap.

"In a few days," he said softly, "you will go. There is the money. Later, I shall get a divorce. I could be less kind—but I choose to do this."

"Where shall I go?" she asked in a dead,

apathetic voice. "There is no place for me now. My own kind turn away from me—you kind hate me. There is only one thing left open to me—do you want to drive me to that? I'm your wife, Moy, please remember, and I have been good and true and faithful—" Her voice broke pitiously.

Again Moy raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders.

"Wherever you wish," he answered. "I am not interested. Back to England would be best, I believe—that would be my—ah—suggestion."

He inclined his head in slight courtesy and went out, closing the door behind him.

In his own study again he took from a dark closet a wicker basket, the contents of which hissed and writhed. Moy Song smiled. Through a glass partition he saw the two cobras within. Their ugly, triangular, flat heads struck repeatedly at the glass in impotent fury.

"If she does not leave soon," he murmured to himself, "these little pets may find their way to her room. I cannot be responsible if she chooses to keep such strange pets! It will be her own fault. Everybody knows her fondness for snakes."

He smiled as he put the basket away again into the closet. Then his mood changed. His eyes lit up with a luster akin to the eyes of the cobras'.

"That girl," he mused, "knows already that she cannot leave here. Something happened on the voyage. I'll find out in a short while—not too soon. I'll give them plenty of time."

As the days passed he laid his plans carefully, methodically, with a cold logical ingenuity that took count of all contingencies.

He spoke to Zelma every day, but she told him nothing and affected surprise at mention of any unpleasantness during the voyage. She knew nothing, of course, of Montozzi's end, and was fearful of saying anything that would cause the captain to react upon Bob.

Moy was puzzled, but he smiled always. Patience, he thought. It would all unravel.

Once or twice Zelma had asked to leave the house, but the suave Chinese watcher shook his head. Moy told her the city was a rough one, and he could not allow her to

venture out. When her father came back he would take her out; in the meanwhile, he, Moy, was responsible for her. Did she understand? Yes?

She did. She understood that she was a prisoner and lived in a perpetual state of fear and apprehension. What little sleep came to her was haunted always by fears of unutterable violences. She grew pale and worn and desperate. At times she would have ended her life had there been any means at all present. But there were none. Moy Song was too clever for that!

CHAPTER XII.

A YOUNG MAN WITH A HOBBY.

THE Kanaka who guarded Bob had a sense of duty not usually possessed by natives. He watched Bob as closely and minutely as if his life depended on it. Bob frequently thought that perhaps it did, knowing Montozzi's code of ethics.

For two days and two nights he was a prey to the most torturing thoughts a man can have—the girl he loved better than life was helpless, in the power of unscrupulous hands that would hesitate at no desecration or violence. And he could do nothing to help her.

He grew insensible to all his surroundings, to everything except her peril. Countless terrors swept across his mind, half sharpened, half dulled by the deadly pain that grew out of his helplessness. At times his anguish drove him to the outskirts of insanity. He ate little or nothing of the food offered him.

On the third day he became somewhat calmer. He resolved to eat, to keep his strength and sanity, and to watch for an opportunity. He reflected, savagely, that it would never be too late for one thing—vengeance! That he *would* have, if Zelma was harmed by as much as a verbal insult! He became quiet and apparently resigned. It brought a grin from the Kanaka to see his sudden quiescence.

By the fourth day the Kanaka had relaxed his vigilance considerably, and Bob began to look about. Whenever the Kanaka left the room Bob searched it feverishly

for some means to cut the stout hemp that bound his wrists and ankles. But there was nothing. At length, laying in his bunk, his hands restless behind him, he discovered down deep, below the blankets and mattress, the protruding head of a nail.

When the Kanaka left to get his lunch, locking the door after him, Bob worked feverishly, but to no avail. The cord was stiff and strong; but he did succeed in cutting his wrist. That wouldn't do. It might be noticed.

After feeding him the Kanaka stood outside the door, talking to one of his kind. Bob went to work again. The chances were slim, but it was a chance. All through the afternoon he tugged and pulled and feigned sleep when the Kanaka looked in on him now and then. By evening he had severed several strands. His heart was racing with fresh hope again.

After his slight dinner he lay down in his bunk again, drawing a grunt of approval from the Kanaka by his apparent resignation to an inevitable situation. It was nearly eleven o'clock when the last strand fell apart, for he had to work cautiously.

Feeling his hands free, he untied his feet, and stretched to take the stiffness out of his joints. Then he waited for the Kanaka to return.

The Kanaka slept in the same cabin. About eleven o'clock he became sleepy and decided to turn in. He never knew what struck him. It was a good, clean, straight-from-the-shoulder knockout. He went limp without a sound.

Bob tied him securely, took his pistol and a knife, and stepped out of the cabin.

Stealing forward he saw the Portuguese mate coming toward him. It would have been a simple thing to shoot the man, but noise meant discovery. He was standing in the shadow of Montozzi's cabin. He tried the door. It was open. He slipped into the dark cabin and waited, pulses hammering.

The mate, however, was also bound for the captain's cabin. He swung in the door, Bob staying behind it, and lit the hanging lamp. Then, in a nervous, wary manner, he began searching drawers and the captain's clothes closet; he even searched the pockets of the clothes.

All at once he glanced around fearfully. The door was open. He went to close it. The next instant a hard fist caught him flush on the jaw and he collapsed as one dead.

With the tablecloth Bob bound him, bending him in a semicircle as he tried to make both ends meet behind. A sardonic grin appeared upon Bob's face; his lips puckered with his desire for aimless whistling, but he checked it.

One night during the voyage he had accidentally witnessed Montozzi in the act of concealing the diamonds he had given him. Bob had no doubt that this was what the mate was searching for, and since he didn't know where they were, it looked as if he had intended stealing them from Montozzi.

Bob blew out the lantern, and taking off the bottom that held the oil reservoir, dumped the oil and the diamonds into his hand. Pocketing his property once more, he guardedly opened the door and peered out. Not a soul was in sight. The night was fairly bright, and the shore looked about a mile away.

Taking off his shoes Bob tied them to his waist, and with the quietness of an otter, slid into the water. He swam with swift ease. Grimly he reflected that this was his third escape by water. It was becoming an unpleasant habit.

Nearly an hour later he landed far to the left of the city and let his clothes dry while he dozed in the jungle growth and planned his course in the morning.

When the city awoke he strolled through the poorer quarters near the bay. He looked like a beachcomber, a white tramp. Not much attention was paid him. There were scores like him on the water front of Macao.

At length he saw what he was looking for—the shop of a Chinese gem merchant.

With the piratical-looking owner, Bob finally struck a bargain for two of the sapphires. He had to practically give them away, but he couldn't help it. The Chinaman, on the other hand, positively believed that the white beachcomber had stolen them; but they were marvelous gems and would mean a fortune to him when resold. He therefore asked no questions and finally gave Bob a sizable roll of bills.

After this Bob worked swiftly and with characteristic snap and speed. He bought new clothes, shed the old ones, and took a *ricksha* to the railroad station. Here he lingered a few minutes, mixed with the people, and later saw a train pull in from Canton. Again he engaged a *ricksha* and told the native to bring him to the best hotel. Then he lay back, his new bag between his feet.

It was Bob's belief that no one would think of looking for him at the best hotel. He looked like a prosperous tourist. At the hotel he registered as "John Arthur Hamby, San Francisco, California, U. S. A." Then he asked the clerk if there were any drafts awaiting him.

The clerk sorrowfully, and with respect, informed him that there were no drafts or letters. With an exclamation of impatience and a petulant frown Bob walked out into the street.

Here he eyed the queer mixture of Oriental and European life: trolley cars that ran side by side with *rickshas*; the streets that looked like any small city, the stone buildings quite up to date. Through all the evidences of modern civilization trooped the Oriental throngs. The rice-and-honey stands on the Bund, the tropical foliage, the strange smells and mixture of tongues contrasted greatly with the orderly sidewalks.

Finally he saw what he was looking for—a big English bank. Here he asked for the president and was soon talking to that curious individual, a stolid Englishman, courteous, dignified.

"It's this way," explained Bob briskly, with the quiet importance of a man of affairs. "I'm John Arthur Hamby, of San Francisco. I'm traveling for pleasure and looking for a certain business opportunity to open up on Palawan Island. I was to find some large drafts here at your bank or at the hotel, but they haven't arrived as yet. As speed is necessary to the success of the venture, I need money now. Will you loan on good security?"

The banker thawed out at once. He saw fat fees, a remunerative client, all in one bat of the eye. Would he? Certainly! What was the security?

"I am a lover and collector of precious gems, sir," answered Bob indirectly. "I

always have some of my—ah—pets with me. A hobby, sir."

The banker nodded sympathetically. Evidently a very rich young man, he thought, with expensive hobbies.

Bob took four of the great diamonds from his pocket. Inwardly his blood was seething; outwardly he was a wealthy young man, cool, collected.

"Will—will you loan ten thousand pounds on these until my drafts arrive? They're worth much more."

The banker's eyes stood out as he fingered the wonderful gems. He gasped.

"Would you allow me—I know nothing of these things, sir—allow me to have them inspected and valued—"

"Certainly—certainly!" agreed Bob heartily. "Send some one you trust to your local authority or jeweler with them. I'll wait—I have some other business in mind that I'd like to discuss with you."

"My son, sir," agreed the now very much impressed banker. "I'll send my son."

While the son was gone Bob stated that he wanted to buy a large yacht. The banker beamed. He had just what Bob wanted, his own yacht, right down in the harbor; all fitted with mahogany, a powerful auxiliary engine, great cruising radius and fast under sail. She was in tiptop order—he always kept her so—but he couldn't afford to run her—she was too expensive—not so very, you understand, but for him— She had cost five thousand pounds; he would be willing to sell her for four thousand pounds.

Bob agreed to look, and to buy, if the boat suited him. The banker became effusive now. Truly, the gods were kind to him this morning!

When the son returned he talked in private with his father for a few minutes. The result was that a very respectful banker advanced Bob ten thousand pounds on the stones. After which Bob looked at the boat, found it ideal, bought it, and had the papers made out to his new name. Then he had lunch with the banker at a fashionable English club.

Suddenly he had become a man of affairs with plenty of money and a splendid yacht of his own. Truly, money is a great power! He smiled bitterly at his thoughts.

In a booking office on the Bund he asked the superintendent to get him a crew together at once. While he was talking he noted a huge young man, with a pinched, humorous face, who was regarding him from a chair near the window. Something about the man attracted Bob. He turned to him.

"Looking for a berth?" he asked.

The young giant saluted.

"I am, sir," he replied. "Haven't had one for some time—I'm flat as a raindrop on a stone pavement!"

"Stranded?"

"Completely, sir!"

"What's your rating?"

"First mate—with the Blue Star Line, sir."

"American?"

"Every damned, inch!"

Bob laughed.

"Do you think you're qualified to command a private vessel, and stay out a year or more at a time—if necessary?"

The giant scented a brother adventurer. His eyes brightened.

"For a berth like that," he said, "I'd be willing to increase my schedule and kill two Chinamen a day—Heaven knows this town can stand it!"

Then, more soberly: "The superintendent has my rating and qualifications, sir."

Bob turned to the superintendent, who stated that the man's ability was up to the mark for the berth.

"All right!" decided Bob swiftly, turning to the big fellow. "Here's some money in advance. My ship is the Morning Star. She's anchored in the bay now. Get a crew—many as you think necessary—white men. Tank her up with gas, look her over and get her ready to go as soon as possible. When you're ready, see me at the Grand Hotel. Now, let's sign up."

The new captain and the new owner left the office together.

"You know the authorities in this port?" asked Bob.

"I do, sir," answered the captain, whose name was Martin O'Toole.

"Well," answered Bob, secretly pleased, "here's some more money to buy provisions—plenty of them—and to grease their palms. Get the necessary papers and give

Graham & Son, Ltd, my bankers here, as references."

"Yes, sir!"

"And—O'Toole!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Don't forget guns and fishing tackle—and all that goes with them."

O'Toole's eyes sparkled.

"Yes, sir!"

"In fact, she's to be ready to go at a minute's notice and stay out indefinitely—and have everything on board for any—contingency."

"Yes, sir!"

"Now, get busy," finished Bob. "You've a lot of work to do and so have I."

O'Toole watched Bob roll away in a *ricksha*, a pleased grin upon his homely face. His fingers caressed the big roll of bills.

"He trusted me!" he thought. "Me for him! Some rip-snortin', go-getter, son-of-a-gun! Well, first to get acquainted with a meal again—I'm as hollow as a drum! Then to work. I'm going to like him—that's the kind of an owner to have! And if he should happen to want the moon to play with, damme if I don't go get it for him!"

That afternoon Bob found out that Moy Song was the owner of the largest gambling house in Macao. He went around the Bund, found the place and looked it over. Bitterly he reflected that he could not call in the local authorities to help him. Being an escaped prisoner himself he did not know at what moment he might be apprehended.

The place looked ominous. Many natives thronged in and out. He wondered if Zelma was somewhere inside. There was only one way to find out—search the place. But how?

As he strolled along, mixing with the conglomerate frequenters of the district, he suddenly felt a hand clutch him and he whirled to face—Paul!

An exclamation of incredulous amazement escaped Bob; the next instant Paul had drawn him inside and whispered:

"Not a word here! Come with me!"

Although hardly able to control his curiosity he went with Paul in silence. In silence, too, he watched as Paul led him to his own hotel, entered the lift and took him

to a room. And here Ada flew into his arms with a cry of joy and kissed him full upon the lips.

It required several minutes for them to get over the wonder of their meeting, several more for Bob to tell of his voyage and its conclusion; then he demanded their story. Paul gave it.

"After we left you," he said in a low tone, "we altered our course, and next day came to another small island. There we buried our half of the vases, taking only a few stones with us. Ada took the latitude and longitude—it's about a hundred miles from where you left yours. Then we determined to go to Macao to help you—if you ever reached the place!

"The Hawk was fast, so we made Hong-kong in good time, but we were worried about explanations, customs officials, *et cetera*. Also, they might be watching for the Hawk.

"So we ran her on a rock outside the harbor and yelled for help—although we had the tender. Well, the Hawk went down with everything except our stones. Then we were towed in by a passing fisherman.

"We explained that we were an American couple circling the globe in our boat. They expect that from you Americans and thought nothing of it. Everybody was kind to us and sorry that we had lost our craft. As everything was lost aboard our boat we weren't bothered by the customs or any one else.

"I sold two stones to a Chinese jeweler, obtained some money and clothes and came on here yesterday to see what we could do for you, if any—"

"I see," interjected Bob, eying the excited Paul. "No thought of the danger you ran, eh?"

Paul sniffed.

"Don't be an ass," he interrupted casually, though he squeezed Bob's hand. Ada's eyes were wet. "No one would think of looking for us here—in a first-class hotel—a couple of thousand miles away! Besides, in these clothes, with no beard, speaking English, why—"

"Well," said Bob presently when they had exchanged further details, "I think she's in that house. We'll have to play a

lone hand. Here's the plan." He swiftly outlined the details.

Because Paul had never been seen by Montozzi or any one else connected with the Water Queen, he spent half the night gambling in Moy Song's place. He lost considerable money to the house. In the meanwhile he made a rapid survey of the plans of the house as far as he could see. His losses, and the cheery way in which he took them, caused the croupiers to christen him the "Mad Englishman."

At last he ran out of money, which only caused him to laugh and to promise that he was coming back on the morrow for his revenge. Moy Song, in person, cordially invited him to come, and promised him satisfaction.

At noon the next day Captain O'Toole reported to Bob that everything was ready.

"And by that I mean *everything*, sir," reiterated the sharp-eyed Irish-American. "We can sail at five minutes' notice."

"Good!" said Bob. "Keep her that way."

He was introduced to Paul and Ada and told that they would be guests.

They spent the afternoon upon the Morning Star, exploring and becoming familiar with her. She was a finely built yacht, stanch, seaworthy and everything else the most fastidious seaman could want.

"If the gods are kind—" thought Bob, looking her over. The sentence remained unfinished. It lay in the lap of the gods.

It was an afternoon of torture to him, though he was glad to be with his friends again. At length the evening came and they discussed their plans again. Ada was to stay on board and wait.

After a hasty meal they sat on deck, silent, apprehensive, worried. The air seemed electric with portent; it finally disturbed the highly susceptible Captain O'Toole, but pleasantly. Then that clairvoyant seaman could stand it no longer. He walked aft, and saluting, stood before Bob.

"Well?" asked Bob nervously.

"I'm thinkin', sir," O'Toole answered, "that by the looks o' things something is in the air. You want to sail at five minutes' notice. Well, if it's anything like a scrap with those pigtailed you've on your mind, could I ask you to favor me and include

me? I owe them a few wallops myself! I'm not trying to butt in, sir, but I'm trying to tell you that you can count on me!"

Bob eyed him for a space in silence.

"I wonder—how far?"

"To the hilt, sir!"

Something about the big fellow inspired Bob with confidence. There was no mistaking his sincerity. It stuck out all over him in gobs.

"Suppose," continued Bob, "I were to tell you that I wanted you and Paul to go to a notorious and influential Chinese gambling house to-night, and that there might be a dangerous row—would you see Mr. Paul through?"

"Would I?" chuckled the giant. "Would I? Did you get my name correctly, sir? Just allow me to hit out at any of 'em? A free-for-all, is it? My God, man, don't leave me here! I haven't had any real amusement for months!"

Paul laughed and Bob smiled.

"All right!" decided Bob suddenly. "Go and get your coat. You'll go with Paul. He'll tell you just what to do—do just that, nothing more; nothing—I don't suppose you'll do less?"

"Not likely, sir!" answered O'Toole, departing for his coat.

"Dieu!" whispered Paul. "He's a whirlwind, and it will help us wonderfully to get our effect."

At about ten o'clock that night Paul and O'Toole strolled into Moy Song's gambling house and dance hall. Fair Kanaka girls with beflowered hair and white dresses hung upon the arms of some of the men, or flitted about the crowd like ghosts in the Rembrandtesque shadows. Huge, coconut-oil lamps illumined the scene none too well, but picturesquely. There were also some Malay girls. Chinese in baggy clothes; some sailors from an Italian cruiser and some from a Brazilian man-of-war; Portuguese, German traders, natives of different hues—the usual habitués of the water front saloon and dance hall.

Paul was hailed by the roulette dealer, and Moy Song himself made him welcome to the establishment. For two hours Paul played every game, seconded by O'Toole.

At midnight, when the activities of the

place were all at their height, when the dancing became a bit wilder and clumsier, and the barkeeper worked faster, Paul and O'Toole began to plunge upon the roulette wheel.

At first both lost steadily, but they laughed and played on with a reckless disregard for money that endeared them to Moy Song's heart. Then Paul began to win. He won so constantly and the sums were so large that Moy Song became apprehensive and took the wheel himself.

Big sums were changing hands, therefore the whole roomful of people began to crowd around to see the fun. And it became faster and faster, Moy Song steadily losing.

Paul placed his wagers recklessly, and O'Toole even more so, yet both men won constantly. The fickle goddess of fortune was crowning their efforts well. Moy Song's smile began to go.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SURPRISE FOR MOY SONG.

MOY SONG'S wife, the White Lily, had gone from one extreme of emotion to another; from lethargic resentment to hot, bitter hatred.

She knew Moy Song. She had been ordered out. It had been suggested that she go back to England. If she didn't comply with the suggestion—something would happen to her. She shuddered. She knew what it would be—death, in one form or another, such death as could never be connected with the urbane Moy Song.

A passionate revolt shook her, a vitriolic hatred entered her heart. To be turned out now for a new favorite after all her sacrifices, the obloquy she had been subjected to! Yet, she knew that Moy's decisions were as inexorable as death. She would have to go or—be carried out!

Seething with rage, she began to dress in European clothes. When her toilet was complete she made her way to Moy's rooms. Ordinarily she wouldn't have dared to do this, but she was now beside herself.

A silent Chinese servant barred her way, but she thrust him aside. He raised his eyebrows and submitted. After all, she was

Moy's wife. It was his business if he had chosen to marry a spitting cat of a white woman.

Before a door of Moy's suite, she found another Chinese servant sitting. From the interior she heard a woman's sob, and in a flash guessed that Moy's new favorite was a prisoner within. She thought of informing the authorities, but quickly put it aside; Moy was all-powerful.

The Chinese servant was immutable under threat or entreaty; he would not allow her to look into the room. When she attempted force, he roughly pushed her aside.

Stung with a new sense of her unimportance in this queer, Oriental household; she went to Moy's own room. There she seated herself before his great, teakwood desk, lit a cigarette and gave vent to her whirling thoughts. Knowing Moy Song, she also knew that her presence would soon be terminated if she didn't leave of her own will.

She looked around at the luxurious room, furnished with a sybarite's taste. From a closet, the door of which was slightly open, she detected a slight hissing that stopped the flying shuttle of her thoughts.

Investigation disclosed two hooded cobras in a wicker basket. A caustic smile came to her lips that was primal and savage.

She took the basket to the light. The ugly reptiles were striking against the glass. She began a tuneless whisper with her lips, a side-to-side swaying with her head; a glassy stare crept into her eyes; the pupils dilated. The cobras ceased to strike and began to sway in mesmeric fascination.

Still whispering and swaying, she at length opened the basket and took the now harmless cobras out. She opened the large drawer of Moy's teakwood desk and laid them there. Coiling, their ugly flat heads laid upon their folds, the beady eyes watched her unblinkingly as she slowly closed the drawer.

A startling change came over her. She swayed as if about to faint. Then, with more control, she put the basket back in the closet and tapped the desk drawer. A vigorous thrashing about and a hiss answered her.

She made her way from the room quietly, walked out of the house unmolested by any one, and then stood in the street a moment. The gambling hall was in its usual uproar. A big game must be going on. She smiled and walked away.

At the railroad station she lowered a heavy veil over her face, bought a ticket to Hongkong, and in a stupor of acute suffering and heart-break, waited for her train.

CHAPTER XIV.

OVER THE ROOFS.

BOB spent two hours reconnoitering around the house of Moy Song. It was a large structure, the entire ground floor of which contained the gambling and dance hall, also the bar and the little tables all around. Above, many windows attested the number of rooms, and all were dark. Some of the rear windows had great iron shutters over them. On the front was the big sign, "Gambling House," as required by law.

Bob strolled along the water front, only vaguely conscious of the exotic beauty of the tropical night. A febrile excitement blinded him to all exteriors. Warm odors came across the star-shot waters of the bay, mixed odors, but of tropical essence: frangipanni bloom, reek of coral trash; the scent from women walking past him, silhouetted figures in the blue darkness.

Toward midnight he finally decided that the only chance of gaining an entrance unobserved was from the roof. The houses on either side were the same height—dark, evil-looking structures whose basements emitted dank, noisome odors. He made his way to the rear of the buildings, and found a tree that came near one of them. Not a soul was in sight in this backwater of the alleys. He climbed the tree slowly and swung to the roof. Then he tiptoed to Moy Song's house over the roofs.

There was a trapdoor on Moy Song's roof that led into the house, but it was fastened securely from the inside. He could not budge it with all his strength applied. Next he investigated a V-shaped affair that seemed to be a ventilator. A faint glimmer

of light showed from it. With his heavy knife he unfastened one end, and by sheer strength, slowly and without noise, bent the heavy, iron-braced zinc backward. It disclosed an iron grille ventilator and a lighted, elegantly furnished bedroom. And looking up into his face with wide, startled eyes was—Zelma!

He saw the amazement, the agony of recognition, the longing love she unconsciously revealed. He motioned hastily to her not to make any sound, though he thought the wild beating of his own heart would wake the city.

The grille was about two feet square and screwed down from the roof. He set to work, and in ten minutes lifted it from its position. Then he unwound a coil of rope from his waist and, making a loop, lowered it to her. She placed it under her arms, and grasped it tightly above. Laboriously he raised her through the grating.

Hardly had she gained the roof when the door of the room opened and the Chinese watcher peered in, attracted by some slight noise they had made. A limpid monosyllabic escaped him when he saw that the room was empty. A glance at the windows assured him that they were tight. He ran into the room and saw the forced ventilator grating.

Bob acted quickly. There was no other way, and he had to give the signal agreed upon, anyway. His automatic cracked, and the Chinaman crumpled, clutching his knee. The next shot splintered the lantern that illuminated the room. Then he took Zelma's hand and guided her across the roofs. He heard a pandemonium of noise come from Moy Song's establishment, breaking glass, curses, shrieks and the hoarse yells of struggling men mingling with the lyric terror of the Kanaka girls.

"Over the roofs," he said under his breath, refastening the rope under Zelma's arms.

She made no answer, but closed her eyes as he helped her lower herself over the edge. Bob braced his shoulder against a chimney and lowered her slowly. When the rope ceased to drag he dropped it over the roof and sprang into the tree. He came down so fast his hands burned. Once

upon the ground he glanced about. Still no one near. He unfastened the rope and, holding her hand, they raced away.

CHAPTER XV.

THE COBRA STRIKES.

IN the gambling house Paul had played recklessly—he wanted to lose. Instead he won—won so consistently that Moy Song, secretly worried but outwardly calm, insisted on staying at the wheel in person. The crowd had drawn close to see these besiegers of fortune throw huge sums into her lap. As all watched, absorbed, a sudden shot rang out, then another. Almost in the same instant Captain O'Toole sprang forward and shouted in his shrill and clear voice:

"He's cheating, Paul! I saw the Chinaman cheat! It's a come-on game!"

Moy turned green. The crowd hedged him about, and he, in common with the others, hardly knew which to pay attention to first—the accusation or the shots from above.

In a twinkling, however, it was decided by Paul, who threw the roulette wheel over with a violent push. O'Toole picked up a chair and went for Moy. In another instant the uproar began. The lights went out. O'Toole flung chair after chair into the struggling group of men, occasionally laying out one with his hamlike fist.

"Boy!" he kept whispering over and over again to himself, as his arms flew. "Isn't this a peach of a scrap?" Then, all at once, he heard his name called, and he withdrew to a window, where he found Paul. Together they went through and raced away down the quiet streets.

Moy Song was only startled for a moment. Battered about, he crawled in the darkness to a panel in the wall which opened to his touch upon a stairway. A conviction that the shots above and the instantaneous eruption below were related began to glimmer in his crafty brain. Then he thought of the White Lily—perhaps those shots—a jealous woman. At any rate, something was wrong. It looked as if it might be an attempt to rescue the

girl he had set all the strength of his evil heart and passions upon.

In his own study he opened his desk drawer to obtain a pistol he kept there. Something bit his hand. A hot fire surged through his veins. Startled out of every vestige of his usual composure, he saw to his horror that it was a hooded cobra. He cried and shrieked and staggered about, but could not make his voice heard above the uproar that raged below.

Finally he collapsed, the cobra still hanging on. When the police investigated, a bit later, they found him. He was dead, and the cobra was coiled upon his chest, watching the horrified spectators wickedly.

CHAPTER XVI.

SAFE IN PORT.

BOB and Zelma sped through the streets until they came to the more respectable sections. Then the girl, breathless, halted. They were back on the Bund now, looking over the waters of the bay. It was late. There were only a few stragglers in sight.

Zelma was breathing hard and leaned against his shoulder. A faint sweetness came to him. It seemed to cling about her. Like an insidious narcotic, it spread in his veins. They were in thick shadows, and no one was near enough to see. He took her in his arms and kissed her. Her lips, cool, unresponsive at first, warmed to his kisses and clung to his lips with a child-sweet tenderness that left him quite out of his head.

"Will you marry me, Zelma?" he whispered. "Now—to-night?"

"If—if—you want me to," she answered, her low, musical voice making a joyous song of the English words.

They found the American consul that night—woke him up out of a sound sleep, in fact—and were married, the consul's servants acting as witnesses. The consul was curious. He asked questions. Bob, naturally, had given his own name; and finally, because the consul had kindly eyes and a deeply lined face that was a diploma of the university of life, Bob told him his

entire story. And Zelma listened and held on to his hand.

The consul hemmed and hawed, and once he blinked his eyes suspiciously.

"I have a bad memory," he said at length, when Bob concluded. "I don't remember a thing you told me, and I never heard of you or what you have told me before. So you and your wife rest a while, and I'll drive you over so you can board your ship. I have an American flivver." He patted Bob's shoulder, looked at Zelma, and left them alone. He was not so old but what the girl's unusual beauty thrilled him. An old bachelor by choice, he yet sighed once or twice.

While a servant went after his machine he lit a cigar and looked over some newspapers. He was suddenly lonely for his own kind, his own country, and he wanted to see pretty girls again—white girls—like Zelma, for instance—not the brown Kankas or Malays. The back copies of his papers had some photographs of just what he wanted to see. They were on a California beach, bathing.

He left Bob and Zelma alone to look wistfully back over the newspapers until he heard the machine sputtering in the street. Then he drove them to their point of embarkation. As he shook hands with Bob he handed him a large envelope. "A little wedding present," he explained. "There's only one stipulation: don't open it until you're miles to sea."

A few minutes later Bob and Zelma boarded the Morning Star, and found Paul, Ada and O'Toole anxiously awaiting them. There was a quiet, though none the less joyous, reunion.

Bob told of his adventure, while Paul and O'Toole laughed over theirs. In the meanwhile the Morning Star, under engine power, was creeping out of the dark harbor, the mate at the wheel.

"Lord," breathed O'Toole ecstatically, "but it was a peach of a row! Never was in a finer thing in my life, sir! I think my Chinese score is about even now. Where are we bound, sir?"

A consultation resulted in the production of two locations, given in latitude and longitude.

"Make both those islands," instructed Bob. "We'll go ashore on each for a half day. Then you can sail—well, I'll give you further instructions later."

"Aye, sir."

Still later Bob, bethinking himself of the consul's wedding present, opened the big envelope. It contained a newspaper clipping. His own name caught his eye. He read it.

It stated that the jeweler, Bedsow, had recovered, and had failed to identify Bob's picture as one of his assailants. The three actual bandits had been caught and identified by him.

The police investigation disclosed his sensational escape, his arrest in France, and his escape from Noumea. An official of the French prison system gave it as his opinion that both men had been the victims of sharks.

It was a good story; and the "sob-sisters" cried over it, and everybody said it was too bad; then a citizen began a movement for an investigation of the laxness of the police, and it died like most investigations.

In silence Bob handed the clipping to Zelma. Then Paul and Ada read it, after which Bob called O'Toole.

"After we make those two stops," he said, "we sail for San Francisco."

O'Toole's eyes lighted suddenly with a great joy. "Aye, sir," he answered and wheeled about.

"Now," said Bob, "I'll be able to help you, Paul. With money to fight the battle, we'll soon clear you."

"I hope so," sighed Paul. "I'll go to America with you and we'll try. Heaven knows I did nothing but try to keep a lunatic from killing me—or my sister!"

Later still—for no one could sleep that night—Bob and Zelma sat forward, watching the rosy dawn grow upon the opalescent tropic waters. And in her unfathomable eyes was such a look of tranquil intensity, of unutterable joy, that comes only to those who love without stint or reservation, and know themselves to be likewise adored.

Her head was on his shoulder, relaxed, content. Both these playthings of a capricious fate were safe in port at last.

THE END.



SACRIFICE

WHEN Grief comes close to you—
 So close that you can see the hue—
 Of his cruel eyes—
 When you can feel his hands
 White and strong as iron bands
 Stilling your cries—
 While Death bends close above
 The one you dearly love—
 How dark the hour!
 You pray with strangled breath:
 "Pass on, pass on, oh, Death,
 Pluck not this flow'r.
 This one who is a part
 Of my own beating heart;
 This one who loves to live,
 Who loves to take and give
 All that makes Life so sweet.
 See, Death, here at thy feet
 I kneel a hostage—nay,
 I will go *all* the way—
 Let him live, and I'll not dread
 Thy touch—take me instead."

Lilian Nicholson.



Above Suspicion

By ROBERT ORR CHIPPERFIELD

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

JOSEPH BENKARD, broker, is found murdered by a blow on the head in the patio of the house of his sister, Mrs. Cayley, at Sunny Beach. Geoff Peters, an eccentric stone mason, keeps away from the body the servants, Mrs. Cayley, her daughter Millie, and Vera Sherwood, a guest. No footprints are found. Geoff conceals a scrap of glossy fabric found near the body. Mrs. Cayley summons Dr. Hood, medical examiner, Stoneham Lane, a business associate of Benkard, who had dined the night before at the Cayley house, and William Dunn, Benkard's secretary. Rupert Ashe, a young man in love with Millie, also dined at the house shortly before the murder. Geoff finds that Lane and Benkard quarreled the night before.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CONSTANT SHADOW.

"YOU here still, Geoff?" Dr. Hood emerged from the library to encounter the stone mason descending the stairs with a trowel, which he promptly stuck in his pocket. "What on earth were you doing up there with that thing?"

"Soundin' the railin' I put up round the gallery for flaws. You told me to stay, doc, and Mis' Cayley said I wasn't to work on the terrace and the district attorney's feller give orders that nobody was to leave the house." Geoff's tone was as matter-of-fact as ever. "Reckoned I'd put in my time some ways."

"H-m!" the doctor observed. "So you've met the detective from the county seat. You're pretty sharp yourself, Geoff. What do you think of him?"

"Seems to me I had the wrong idee o' detectives." Geoff shook his head. "Kind-er thought they went round quiet and found out what they could without blowin' no horn to advertise who they was and what they was there for. Shouldn't be s'prised if he made himself real busy for a day or two, but I hope he lets my concrete mixer and tools alone. What's he doin' now?"

"Outside examining all the doors and windows to see if any of them were forced during the night."

There was amused contempt in the doctor's tone.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 11.

"He don't take any stock in the fact that the terrace doors were wide open within a dozen feet of where the body was found!"

"Still, somebody would have had to walk across the loose sand on the floor from the doors o' the terrace to the bench, and from all I heard tell, Mr. Benkard set facin' 'em."

Geoff spoke meditatively as though to himself, and his companion watched him with a shrewd, attentive light in his eyes.

"How'd he git hit on the back o' the head? Then, unless the feller that did it smoothed out his tracks as he left—and the smoothin' out would show same as foot-prints—how'd he go?"

"That argument would hold good if he came from any other direction of the court, and he certainly didn't fly!" Dr. Hood retorted. "You gave me some good ideas that helped a lot when Jim Hicks was found dead in the swamp and again when old Mrs. Beckley was murdered in her barn, and I always thought you had the makings of a detective yourself, Geoff, for all you're slow-thinking. Come on out front a minute; I want to tell you a theory of mine about this case and see how it strikes you."

They passed out of the broad entrance doors and down the steps to the driveway, where they halted and looked about them, but no one was in sight.

"I'd like to hear it, doc. This is one o' the doggonedest things I ever see!" responded Geoff. "I ain't heard no weepin' and wailin' about it, either, not from anybody."

The doctor darted another quick glance at him.

"Sometimes folks think more of your life insurance and your will than they do of your company," he commented dryly. "That's how I size this situation up so far, and men that fight their way through to success are bound to leave a few scars and bruises behind them. Now, suppose Benkard was sitting there smoking on that bench last night and some one he knew well, or perhaps even expected, came through the terrace doors and joined him.

"Suppose the visitor had a heavy hammer or a short iron bar or some other weapon hidden under his coat waiting for a chance to brain him with it; suppose he

dropped something on purpose behind the bench and got up and went around to get it, and Benkard, not suspecting anything, didn't turn his head, but maybe even dropped it forward a little on his chest as though he were thinking. If the blow was struck then and the murderer went out through the terrace doors, leaving them wide open behind him, there's something we haven't taken into consideration that would have helped him by wiping out his foot-prints on that sanded floor, Geoff, and it could only have done it in that one place in all the court; the night breeze!"

Dr. Hood paused in an unconsciously dramatic effect, but his companion's expression did not change. He stared straight before him in stolid reflection and his thumbs sought the straps of his overalls and crooked there.

"Well, doc," he vouchsafed at last, "I don't aim to put forward my opinion, but since you're askin' me for it, the wind last night was from the south, not the north, that those terrace doors open out on, and if it had 'a' been, how could it have got under and behind that bench to blow away the footprints there, too, if the feller walked around it? Then, why would it wipe out his footprints and leave Benkard's there in front of the bench, where we both seen 'em as plain as day? The rest of it seems a likely enough idee—"

"It's the only one!" the doctor interrupted, nettled in spite of his habitual good nature by the unenthusiastic reception of his theory. "No matter which way the wind was from a little scurry of breeze was likely to swirl in at the open door and just by chance scatter the sand and smooth over the footprints in that one spot, leaving a space a few inches away undisturbed.

"It's the only explanation, for there bein' none visible this morning, and the murderer may not have gone around behind the bench; that's a mere detail. I tell you, Geoff, you'll find that I've hit it before this case is finished!"

"I ain't got no ideas about it at all," admitted Geoff. "Reckon you're right about my bein' slow-thinkin', doc. Seems to me, though, that no matter how rich and successful I'd be I'd want somethin', even

a dog, to grieve when my time come to be took! Who do you s'pose is a-comin' in Hank's deepo jitney? He ain't driv' so fast since the town hall burned over to the Corners!"

A dilapidated small car came at a wild pace up the driveway swinging from side to side and the two spectators hopped nimbly out of its way as it drew up before the steps with a clatter.

"Hello, doc!" the youthful driver cried eagerly. "How's things? Any news?"

But Dr. Hood was present on official business and he merely nodded to his interrogator and stepped forward to intercept the single passenger who alighted. Geoff retreated to the shadow of the entrance hall.

"I'm the medical examiner in charge. What's your business here, sir?"

The newcomer was a frail, slender, stoop-shouldered man who seemed prematurely aged. He hesitated as though bewildered and the face he turned to the doctor showed deep, furrowed lines while he blinked nearsightedly in the sunlight.

"I am William Dunn, Mr. Benkard's private secretary. Mrs. Cayley sent for me—"

His voice was low and tremulous and it was obvious that he was laboring under great agitation, if not some deeper emotion. "I have been given to understand that Mr. Benkard is—is—"

He seemed unable to continue, and the doctor replied gravely:

"Mr. Benkard was found dead this morning, and it looks like foul play. Mrs. Cayley is engaged just now, but come this way; there are some questions I want to ask you, Mr. Dunn."

"'Foul play!'" The other's jaw dropped. "I was only told of—of sudden death! Can it be true that, after all these years—"

They were passing Geoff in the entrance hall now as the doctor led the way to the dining room and he saw the sudden glistening of the secretary's faded eyes.

"You have been a long time with Mr. Benkard?" Dr. Hood's tone was sympathetic.

"Seven years, doctor. Seven—years!" Dunn repeated in a whisper like a man in a

dream. "I—I was a broker myself in good standing once, but I met with reverses. Do they know who—who killed him?"

The doctor's reply was lost in the closing of the dining room door, and Geoff made his way out to the terrace once more. It was deserted, but retrieving his pipe which he had left to cool on the pile of boards, he seated himself, and was proceeding to refill it when a bulky shadow appeared on the newly dried concrete, and he looked up to find the county detective confronting him.

"You the guy that's been doing this work around here?" He gestured comprehensively, and Geoff nodded. "I'm Detective Sergeant Eliot, from the Homicide Bureau of the office of the district attorney!"

He flipped open the lapel of the light gray coat for an instant, displaying his badge, but the stone mason merely nodded again and went on filling his pipe.

"Heard tell you was a-comin', and I seen you when you stopped the cook from leavin'," he remarked.

"I thought it was you in the kitchen! What were you doing there?"

"Gittin' some coffee." Geoff cupped his hands over the match he had lighted and then drew the cool, fragrant smoke in contentedly.

"So you were going to let her make her get-away, were you?" Sergeant Eliot adopted a bullying tone, and the other squinted at him quizzically.

"Nobody hadn't 'p'inted me deputy nor told me to stop her, and I aim to mind my own business," he drawled in perfect good humor. "My job is to finish this here terrace and the garage soon's I git a chance."

"Been working here long?" the detective demanded.

"Off and on ever since the foundations was laid."

"Inside as well as out? Any of that plaster stuff around the fountain and the balcony?"

"All o' the finishin' off, only it ain't plaster," explained Geoff. "It's stucco and—"

"Never mind what it is; I'm no bricklayer!" Sergeant Eliot had dropped his bullying tone and his manner was heavily

facetious. "If you've been here working on the inside from the beginning you're the man I'm after to tell me how the rooms are laid out downstairs. For instance, what's this long one here at the left that runs from the library all the way back?"

"It's a goin' to be the conservat'ry when Mis' Cayley gits round to puttin' in the plants and such, as you could have told from the windows if you'd been a-past 'em outside."

There was the barest suspicion of a twinkle in the bovine brown eyes.

"And on this side there's the kitchen and pantry and dining room, and then another room that stretches across the front to the entrance hall, about as big as the parlor opposite, but it seems to be shut up," the detective pursued. "What's it used for, anyway?"

"Nothin', now. Mis' Cayley's goin' to have the ceilin' hand-painted and move the piano in from the parlor and call it a 'music room,' but I heard tell they was expectin' to have lots o' gay society doin's; dancin' and card parties and private play actin'."

"Are the windows of that and the conservatory always fastened?"

"Reckon so." Geoff smoked on with elaborate nonchalance. "Henry 'tends to that—Henry Carp, the butler."

"And the doors of both of these unfinished rooms; are they kept locked?"

Geoff squinted up once more.

"Dunno's I can tell you that, Mr.—Sergeant. I ain't had occasion to go in either of 'em since the family moved here, and that's been about a month. There was lots o' sets o' keys made to every room in the house, but I never heard tell who had 'em, 'cept Mis' Cayley and Henry—and, o' course, Mr. Benkard."

"What's your name?" asked the detective suddenly, after a pause.

"Geoffrey Peters."

"Got your card with you?"

Geoff thrust out his lantern jaw a trifle.

"I don't belong to no union and I don't need to; everybody round here knows me like they knew my father before me, and he was the best carpenter and mason in the county. I git more odd jobs and steady

ones than I can 'tend to, and I hope you and the constable—I mean, the lieutenant—will ketch the feller soon that killed Mr. Benkard so's I can git on with my work!"

Sergeant Eliot chuckled.

"Guess you won't be idle long, then!" he boasted, then added quickly in a lowered tone: "Who is this?"

Geoff glanced toward the path which led around the west side of the house from the newly laid-out garden and rose.

"Young lady visitin' here; Miss Sherwood, her name is," he replied. "Friend o' Mis' Cayley and her daughter from the city. Reckon I'll git on down to the beach and see how them concrete piles o' the boathouse is settin', unless there's somethin' else you want to ask me?"

"Not now." The detective motioned him away, and Geoff reached in the tool box for his cap and then strolled off down the terrace steps, but as soon as he was out of sight from above he felt in the torn lining of the cap for the precious bit of soft, glossy, black fabric which he had secreted there.

Reassured of its safety he went on whistling his gay but monotonous refrain of the morning, at first softly, then shrill and clear, as he approached the boathouse. As he expected, two youthful, anxious faces peered cautiously at him from around the corner of the tiny veranda which faced the Sound.

Affecting not to notice them, he stooped and ran his hand down one after another of the concrete piles, but when he reached the one nearest to them at the water's edge the whistle ceased.

"Tain't any o' my business." He spoke as though to himself. "But I kinder think somebody's been missed from the house. That young lady who's visitin' there, Miss Sherwood, just come lookin' round outside real anxious. She's on the terrace now, but I don't reckon she's 'quainted with that path leadin' out back o' the garage."

Cutting short the grateful thanks of the pair by renewed whistling he turned and started for the terrace once more, but he silenced his refrain abruptly before he reached the steps and ducked hastily through a clump of bushes beside them until he stood just beneath the spot where he

had left the detective. Miss Sherwood's low, clear tones came distinctly to his ears.

"Yes, I understand perfectly. I make my home in New York with Mrs. Harper Middleton on Park Avenue. . . . None with the exception of some distant cousins of the same name from whom I have not heard in years."

The unintelligible rumble of the detective's voice intervened, and then at intervals her replies.

"A frightful shock, naturally, although I am merely a friend of the family. Mr. Benkard was a man who will not soon be forgotten by those who really knew him. I believe that I must have been the last of the household to see him alive, except for Carp, when he went to lock up, for Miss Cayley had retired some time before, and Mrs. Cayley preceded me by a few minutes. In the library, Mr. Benkard asked me to go for a sail this afternoon, I remember, if he could arrange to return from town in time. . . . No, certainly not! Nothing whatever of that sort! I have told you that I am just a friend of Mrs. Cayley and not a particularly intimate one! This is the first time that I have ever been a house guest of hers, in town or country!"

The indignation of the young woman's disclaimer made the nature of Sergeant Eliot's question plain. Geoff waited to hear no more, but keeping close to the house wall he made his way to the front and in at the entrance.

Dr. Hood was just crossing the patio from the staircase to the dining room, half leading and half supporting the shaking form of the old butler, and he beckoned imperatively. Geoff sauntered along in their wake until they had entered the room and he heard Henry's quavering tones.

"Oh, Mr. Dunn, sir! This is a sad day for all of us!"

"A day of shocking changes, indeed, Carp." Dunn's low, still dazed voice replied, and then the doctor reappeared in the patio.

"I want you to hear this, Geoff!" he whispered. "I told you it was somebody Benkard knew well and perhaps expected, but I guess it wasn't quite the way I thought and my theory is knocked into smith-

ens! Go into the pantry; I'll open the door between on a crack."

With a wary eye on the opposite gallery lest Letty appear, and a quick glance or two toward the library from which the subdued sound of voices still issued, Geoff hurried to the small door leading to the pantry and slipped in silently.

"Henry," Dr. Hood was saying in his most persuasive tones, "Mrs. Cayley wants you to tell the truth, and all the truth as far as you know it. Mr. Dunn has just told me something that he is going to repeat to you, and I want you to say whether you ever heard anything about it or not; whether it was ever discussed by Mr. Benkard and any of the family at home in your hearing. Do you understand?"

"I—I think I do, sir." Henry's voice had risen a note, as though he already anticipated what was coming and was apprehensive of it. "I haven't seen Mrs. Cayley, sir, since early morning and I don't know that she would wish to have me mention what might have been said at home—"

"She wishes everything done, everything told, that will help to find the murderer of her brother, no matter what else should be brought out. She gave me that message herself!" the doctor interrupted. "Tell Henry what you told me, Mr. Dunn."

"I said that for the last three or four years Mr. Benkard had been in fear for his life."

The secretary's low voice had steadied, and now it rang out with unexpected firmness.

"I said that he knew he had some enemy who was only biding his time and would get him in the end. I said that he was a man who walked in the constant shadow of death!"

"Mr. Benkard didn't know what it was to be afraid of anything nor anybody, sir, that I ever heard of!" Henry cried. "If— if he did have some enemy who—who might have threatened him it didn't frighten him, for he wasn't afraid of death itself!"

"But he did have such an enemy! He had been threatened with death, and you and the family knew it!" Dr. Hood exclaimed.

"Henry Carp did know it." Dunn's

level tones followed with almost sinister insistence upon the medical examiner's accusation.

"You knew when the anonymous letters began coming on certain days of every year and how he defied them! He never would admit that he guessed who sent them, or why, and perhaps he didn't know the identity of his enemy, but he knew the reason all right! He used to wait for the days to come and pass—"

"Oh, it's true!" Henry broke down. "He wouldn't have a special guard or go to the police, and after the first year not even Mrs. Cayley dared to speak to him about it, but we knew and waited, too, and when I laid eyes on him this morning I saw that it had come at last! It's been just as Mr. Dunn says, sir; for these four years and more past Mr. Benkard has walked in the shadow of death!"

CHAPTER V.

THE CURIOSITY OF LETTY.

FOR a brief space, save for the stertorous breathing of the old butler as he strove to regain control of his emotions, there was silence in the dining room.

The secretary stared straight before him, and Dr. Hood glanced meaningly toward the pantry door behind which Geoff stood listening with all his ears. Then, as though to himself, William Dunn spoke. "'Barking dogs never bite,' he used to say. I've seen them come to him at the office cringing and bullying, begging and bargaining, the men he'd beaten at their own game, and he laughed at them all; but he didn't laugh at this thing that hung over him!

"I might have known that something terrible was happening last night, for I seemed to have a premonition—a sense of impending horror for which I could not account. Sleep would not come to me, and at last I dressed again and went out, to walk the streets aimlessly till it was nearly morning."

The doctor cleared his throat. "Why did you say that perhaps Mr. Benkard did

not know who it was that was threatening him, but that he knew the cause? Do you mean that some one had taken up another's quarrel with him?"

"Perhaps, doctor. A man cannot be as close to another day after day as I have been to Mr. Benkard all these years without getting to know him pretty thoroughly, and to a certain extent I may say that he confided in me. I mean that he would let himself go occasionally, show his thoughts and feelings without the restraint he exhibited toward almost every one else." Dunn paused and covered his eyes with one thin hand, but after a moment it fell to the arm of his chair and he continued:

"He never showed me one of those letters, nor told me the contents except that some lunatic was threatening his life for an imaginary cause that he couldn't fathom, but when he raged against the sender of them he seemed sincere enough in his wonder as to the man's identity.

"It was only when he spoke of the alleged reason for the insane persecution that his tone assumed the defensive. I always thought that perhaps the letters themselves or the dates on which they came so regularly recalled some incident in the past in which he had gotten the best of a deal and the loser nursed a grudge."

Dr. Hood shook his head.

"That wouldn't account for murder, Mr. Dunn, especially if it were some one else who took up the grudge and that person was actually insane. I never heard of a maniac able to keep track of dates with such regularity as you say over a period covering several years, but perhaps he was crazed only on the one subject, and had brooded over it until it had become an obsession. That would hardly be the case if it concerned a mere financial deal, with a third party at that!"

"It might if that deal involved ruin for others, doctor," Dunn said, "and the writer of those letters were one of them and believed Mr. Benkard to be responsible. You don't know what it is to have everything swept away! I do, but my failure was my own fault, an error in judgment or perhaps lack of nerve in a crisis, and I had no one to blame but myself.

"I was present less than two years ago when a man who had been wiped out on the market the day before forced his way into Mr. Benkard's private office and leveled a revolver at him. Mr. Benkard just laughed and took it away from him. He had courage, as Carp says. He wasn't afraid of anything on earth."

"Did the man ever trouble him again?" the doctor asked.

"No, sir." Dunn's voice sunk to a whisper. "He blew his own brains out that night. Of course, Mr. Benkard had nothing to do with his failure—he just imagined it—and I only mentioned it to show you to what lengths despair can drive a man sometimes."

"On the blind impulse of the moment, maybe, but not in the calculated persecution which your story of these letters indicates." Dr. Hood removed his spectacles and began to polish them absentmindedly. "On what dates did they come? Were they sent to his home or to his office?"

"On the 10th of October and the 1st of January. Sometimes they came to the office, but more often to his home."

"But wasn't it your custom as his secretary to go through the office mail yourself?" demanded the doctor.

"Not on those dates." Dunn shook his head. "The first letters had gone to his home, you see, doctor, and I had instructions after that not to touch the mail in either October or January until Mr. Benkard turned it over to me again; but it was always back in my hands on the 11th of October and—except this year—by the 2d of January. The letters came promptly."

"I call to mind well when the first one came to the house." It was Henry who spoke, and although his tones were feeble they were fairly controlled. "That was four years ago last New Year's Day. I'd sorted the mail, never thinking, and put it at his place, and Mrs. Cayley's and Miss Mildred's at the breakfast table. I was serving them, when all at once I heard Mrs. Cayley cry out and ask him what was the matter."

"Mr. Benkard laughed and crushed the letter in his hand, and said it was nothing:

that some crank or practical joker had sent him an anon—anonymous threat. I noticed, though, that he only pretended to eat after that, and a little later I saw him burning the letter and envelope in the open fire in his study. There was an informal reception that afternoon and a small dinner party at night—they didn't go in for society so much then, sir—but all day Mr. Benkard looked as though he was seeing ghosts!"

"And when did the second letter come?"

"On the 10th of October, sir, as Mr. Dunn says, and it was just the same, only Miss Mildred being away at boarding school, Mrs. Cayley made a bit of a scene, if you'll excuse me for saying so, wanting to see the letter and demanding to know what it was all about."

"Mr. Benkard got in a rage, the worst I ever knew him to have, and told her not to meddle in his affairs or—or she would regret it. I don't know that Mrs. Cayley would like me to speak of it, especially now, sir, but you said she wanted me to tell all the truth."

Henry paused, but the doctor reassured him.

"That's right, Henry. Go on."

"Let me see, then, sir. That will be three years ago next October, and the following New Year's Day I looked over the mail right carefully; you may be sure, but I couldn't see anything suspicious; nor was there. The letter didn't come! All day I watched Mr. Benkard, and I noticed that Mrs. Cayley did, too—and we—we all waited, but nothing happened. Miss Mildred didn't know anything about it, having forgotten what happened the previous year, of course."

"It was the next day when Mr. Benkard came home from the office, and I was helping him off with his coat, that I saw in his face he must have had the letter down town."

"He did," Dunn affirmed. "When I reached the office at my usual time I found him there before me, burning some papers in a big brass ash tray, and he was in a towering fury. That was the first I heard about the letters, when he burst out and told me about the first two. He said just

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what I've told you, doctor, no more and no less, and he gave me instructions then about the mail for the next October."

"Where was the fourth letter sent?"

"To the house, sir, and the fifth, too; in October, and then on New Year's Day—that was two years ago last New Year's." Henry took up the recital. "He bore it better, but you could see it was wearing him down, like a man under sentence. Mrs. Cayley and me, we'd never spoke of it, but there was a kind of an understanding between us, and we could tell. Different kinds of envelopes must have been used each time, for I never knew which to look for, and Mr. Benkard always burned them directly afterward. My memory isn't what it used to be, but the next one must have gone to the office."

He looked at the secretary, who nodded without speaking, and Henry went on:

"The last to come to the house was on New Year's Day a year ago, and Mr. Benkard shut himself up in his study for hours afterward, but when he came out he was more like his old self than he had been for days.

"You see, sir, I could tell the strain he was under, and how he'd begin to wait when it neared time for the date to come around. I fancy Mr. Dunn must have taken notice of it, too."

"I did, of course," said Dunn, "and although no one else at the office had an inkling of the matter I think the whole staff felt that something was in the air at those times. When the final letter came last October I was relieved that he merely laughed at it instead of becoming enraged, but he was unusually thoughtful for days thereafter, absentminded, I might say, and his keen business acumen seemed to slip a cog. He pulled himself together, though, and in a week or two he was plunging more actively into the game than ever; that is, until January."

He paused, and the doctor observed:

"If no anonymous letter reached him then either at home or his office, it might have been sent to one of his clubs."

Henry shook his head, and Dunn replied quickly:

"It wasn't, doctor, because all that

month he insisted on opening and examining his own mail, and his business affairs went to pieces. Every deal he undertook fell through, and it began to be whispered about that he was losing his grip, breaking up. They were all down on him then like a pack of wolves, but toward the latter part of the month he began to change gradually, to come back.

"It was as though a burden were slipping from him a trifle more each day, and on the 1st of February he flung the whole heap of mail unopened on my desk and said: 'Here, Bill, here's your old job back. My anonymous friend has thrown up the sponge.'

"Since then Mr. Benkard has been just as he was before the first of those letters came, and he not only made up for his January losses, but he's pulled off some of the most sensationally successful coups of his career."

"He was the same at home, sir, Henry supplemented. "From New Year's on he scarcely ate or slept, and every hour he was waiting, waiting! Then little by little his old spirit came back, and it's been as if those letters was never written. But it must have come at last, sir, the thing he was waiting for! It must have come last night!"

The weak tears of age sprang to his eyes, and as he threatened to collapse once more Dr. Hood rose hastily.

"Come along, Henry; you'd better go back and rest now, and try not to think about it. I'll give you a little something that'll help you to sleep. Wait here till I get downstairs again, Mr. Dunn, and if any one should happen to come in don't mention this conversation. You understand, don't you?"

The secretary nodded, and the other two left the room while Geoff slipped from his hiding place and through the outer door of the kitchen, which opened on a pergola beside the terrace. He'd had enough of eavesdropping for one day, and there was a question to be settled in his own mind.

The noon whistles blew at a distant mill while he was still strolling back and forth under the trellised arbor, and more from habit than anything else he procured his

dinner from where it reposed wrapped in a newspaper on his coat in the tool box and seated himself on the steps.

If he had hoped to devour it undisturbed he was disappointed. Scarcely had he consumed his first sandwich of cold fried pork and bread than a thin voice twanged behind him, and turning, to his astonishment, he beheld Letty advancing with a glass and bottle in her hands.

"I was thinkin' maybe a little ginger ale would go good with your lunch, Geoff," she remarked jerkily. "I don't know what I would have done with old Henry this mornin' if it hadn't been for you when—when we found Mr. Benkard!"

"It's a pity no one thought o' old Henry afterward," he replied. "Thank you kindly for this, though."

He drank deeply, but eyed her askance over the rim of the glass, for the acidulous housemaid had shown him no favors before, and he was wary.

"I did think of him when I could get a minute from Mrs. Cayley and the others, but he told me you'd brought him up some coffee and he didn't want anything else." Without invitation she plumped herself down on the steps beside him with her sharp elbows on her knees and her sharper chin in her hands. "I went up again just now, but he's sleepin' like a child, and I'm glad of it. He seemed nearly crazy from the shock of comin' on Mr. Benkard like that! When you saw him, could you get anything out of him, Geoff? What did he say?"

So that was it! She had come to pump him. But why should she care particularly what the butler or anyone else had said about Joseph Benkard's death? Was it just a woman's love-of-gossip? Geoff finished the other sandwich before he replied: "I didn't try to git anythin' out o' him. 'Tain't none o' my affairs, but I wouldn't say Henry was noways crazy; seems real bright and level-headed to me for an old feller."

"Well, he isn't; he's in his second childhood, if you ask me, but the shock was enough to drive anybody out of their head." Letty peered into the newspaper spread between his knees. "What are you

eatin'? Doughnuts and apples and stale cheese! Goodness gracious, what messes you bachelors do fix up for yourselves!"

"It's what I like!" Geoff protested in some alarm. "I been eatin' it steady for fifteen year, ever since my ma died."

"Just you wait!" Letty rose. "Zeppa is a good-for-nothing, lazy thing, but she makes lovely chocolate cake, and I think there's some left."

She was gone before he could remonstrate further, and philosophically Geoff poured himself another glass of ginger ale. After all, he had committed himself by accepting that, and he might as well take whatever else was offered, but this new attitude on her part was disquieting. Letty returned presently with a huge wedge of cake on a plate and seated herself again beside him.

"I guess you'll like that better," she remarked in answer to his cautiously worded thanks. "My, what a mornin' it's been! First that—that awful business, and then havin' to break the news to Mrs. Cayley and the young ladies, and trying to keep 'Zeppa from havin' a fit, and then the police comin'! The doctor is a friend of yours, isn't he, Geoff? I saw you talkin' to him two or three times. What does he think about the murder?"

Her tones were confidentially lowered as she bent nearer to him, and Geoff edged away.

"Doc Hood's a friend to nigh everybody in the county, goin' miles day or night to take care o' the sick, whether they kin pay or not," he observed noncommittally. He's knowed me since I was knee-high to a grasshopper, but he wouldn't likely talk to me about his criminal cases as med'cal examiner. He asked me questions just the same as he done to everybody else."

"What kind of questions, Geoff?" Her voice was a mere whisper now, and she hitched along closer to him on the step. He saw with dismay that she would soon have him hemmed in against the balustrade and escape would be impossible. "Dr. Hood asked me a lot of questions, too, and he was awful kind about it, but I couldn't make head nor tail of what he was gettin' at. What did he ask you?"

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Geoff remembered all at once that it was the doctor himself who had called him "slow-thinking," and he smiled inwardly. "Well, after he'd got through about this mornin', he asked me if I'd seen any s'picious characters hangin' round while I been workin' here the last few days—tramps or tough-looking city fellers that might have been burglars spyin' out the place. Then he wanted to know if I'd noticed any strange motor boats anchored down there offshore, or ottermobiles pretendin' to be stuck in the road right close to the gates with license plates from 'way off somewhere."

Geoff warmed to his subject. "After that he started about the ketches on all the winders and locks on the doors, and was there any alarm system, and did Mr. Benkard have a gun that I'd heard tell of? Did he ask you any o' them things?"

"He did not!" Letty eyed her companion in open skepticism. "I must say it's funny, too! Did you talk to that detective from the county seat?"

"He talked to me!" Geoff chuckled. "Kinder likes to hear himself, don't he? Reckon he had an idee I might have done it! He asked me every question he could think o' 'bout myself, and I expect I'm liable to find him snoopin' round my place down by the crick 'most any time. What do you think o' him?"

Letty's sniff was eloquent.

"I guess if it was goin' to depend on him we'd never find out who killed Mr. Benkard!" She caught herself up suddenly. "Mr. Lane is here."

"I heard tell so."

Geoff's tone was absent, for he was wondering what she meant and why she had stopped and changed the subject as though sorry she had spoken. On whom was the investigation to depend if not on the local and county authorities?

"Mr. Benkard's secretary, Mr. Dunn, came a while ago, too," Letty remarked after a pause.

"Seen him when he driv' up, but I ain't spoke to him," responded Geoff truthfully enough. "He looked 'most as bad as old Henry."

"They're a good pair!" she exclaimed.

"Henry's in his dotage and Mr. Dunn's half cracked about losin' his own money in Wall Street. They'd both outlived their usefulness when we came on to make our home with Mr. Benkard six years ago, and why he kept them I never could see, though Mrs. Cayley got kind of fond of old Henry, and I like him because he's willing and faithful enough. I guess Mr. Dunn is, too, but if anybody was to listen to either of them and believe a word they said it 'd be downright foolishness!"

"Why?" Geoff asked mildly.

"Because they're likely to imagine all kinds of things now that Mr. Benkard has been murdered, and make mountains out of mole hills, thinkin' they can help trace the one who did it! I shouldn't be surprised right now if one or the other of them wasn't cookin' up some notion or makin' a mystery out of nothin'!"

"Except that old Henry's asleep, you say, and I expect Mr. Dunn is busy with Mis' Cayley," Geoff remarked. "You come with her and her daughter to New York, didn't you? Where did you live before that? I ain't never had time to git nowhere only just round here."

Letty bit her thin lips.

"We came from Milborough, in Pennsylvania," she said shortly.

Geoff debated for a moment and then made a valiant effort.

"You couldn't have been with Mis' Cayley long; you ain't old 'nough to've been out o' school more'n a few year."

He gulped when the words were out and awaited the result of his rash move with trepidation, but nothing happened, and after a brief space he stole a sidelong glance at her. To his surprise Letty's face had turned a dull brick-red and a little suggestion of a smile softened her sharp features.

"Age is sometimes deceivin', Geoff!" She laughed, not unpleasantly. "I've been with Mrs. Cayley since two years before her husband dled and that 'll be ten years next September, poor man!"

"You workin' twelve year! If anybody else was to've told me I'd never have believed it!" he exclaimed gallantly, adding: "What did Mis' Cayley's husband do? Was he in big deals like Mr. Benkard?"

The query was put innocently enough, but Letty's smile disappeared, and she gave him a sharp, suspicious glance.

"He didn't do anything. He was an invalid," she replied with an air of finality.

"Mercy, I can't sit here gabbing' all day!"

She rose and he did likewise, with a sigh which might have been an expression of regret or relief.

"Nor me, neither, though it's the first time we got kinder acquainted. I puttered round all morning doin' nothin' and now I reckon I'll move my concrete mixer over to the garage and git to work there. Mis' Cayley didn't say I shouldn't and I'll be out o' folks' way—"

"Hey, Geoff!" Lieutenant Zeke Foster came around the corner of the house on a run. "Seen anythin' o' Doc Hood?"

"No! What's up?" Geoff demanded, deserting his erstwhile companion abruptly.

"That detective from the district attorney's office has found where a window o' that big empty room at the front was forced and the lock o' the door broke! That's how the murd'rer got in last night!"

CHAPTER VI.

GEOFF HELPS.

THE creek which wound between broad, gently sloping meadows to the Sound reflected the last pink glow of sunset that evening as Dr. Hood left his car at the side of the main road and made his way along the narrow, well-worn path toward a tiny frame cottage set in a garden that fairly rioted with bloom.

As he neared it a deep-throated baying sounded from within and Geoff's tall, lanky figure appeared in the doorway.

"Why, hello, doc!" Unfeigned surprise and pleasure quickened his drawling tones. "Don't reckon you've been here since ma died! Come in!"

"You've kept up her garden, I see." The doctor paused to sniff at a fragrant rose bush.

"Yes," Geoff replied half apologetically, as though revealing a hidden weakness.

"Seems kinder more like livin' with some-thin' pretty round. Go on outside, Rufe."

He added the last to a nondescript hound which had ceased its baying and come to the doorway beside him inquiringly. The dog obeyed, wagging its tail in friendly fashion at the visitor and then trotted off to the shed, from whence came the occasional stamp of a horse's hoofs.

"What sort of a collection have you in your menagerie now, Geoff?" asked the doctor as he followed his host into the immaculate kitchen.

"Only Rufe, and Sim Perkins's old mare that he turned out to die last winter and— and Lady, here."

As he spoke a huge, silky, buff-and-white bundle moved on an old quilt in the corner and a great dog raised herself on her fore-legs with the hind ones stretched out helplessly behind her.

"Why, it's a Russian wolfhound! A beauty!" Dr. Hood exclaimed. "What happened to her that her hind quarters are paralyzed—run over?"

"She's been mistreated," Geoff responded briefly, but there was that in his tone which few had ever heard there. "I was give ten dollars to take her out and shoot her, but I brought her home instead, and the vet I had down from the city says she's goin' to git well. Set down, doc. I reckoned I'd keep out o' what wasn't my business, so I worked on the garage all afternoon."

"It looks as though this case were anybody's business," the doctor observed ruefully as he seated himself. "I'm going to perform the autopsy to-night, but there will be nothing to it, and then I'm out of it until the trial, if there ever is one! Sergeant Eliot is using Zeke for a sort of watchman since he discovered that the window and inner door of the empty music room had been forced, and he's busier than a bird dog around the place, but somehow I don't take much stock in that story of the forced window, Geoff."

"No burglary was attempted, and if the murderer wasn't a stranger and had reconnoitered he would have found the man he was looking for sitting unarmed within a few feet of those open doors. Mrs. Cayley tried to bluff when I asked her about those anonymous death threats, but finally she had to admit that her brother had received

a few such letters, evidently the work of some harmless crank, and no one had paid any attention to them except perhaps his overzealous secretary or poor, childish old Henry."

Geoff chuckled.

"Yes. She sent Letty out when I was eatin' my dinner to bribe me with a bottle o' ginger pop to let on to you that Henry and that there Dunn were a couple o' half-cracked fools and not to listen to 'em. She was real anxious, though, to find out what you thought and what the sergeant had asked me, and I reckon she told Letty to pump me generally."

The doctor's eyes twinkled.

"Was the pumping good?"

"Well." Geoff rubbed his chin. "That there Letty's real faithful, but then she's been with Mis' Cayley for twelve years. Mis' Cayley's husband was an invalid and died ten year ago, and four years afterward she and Miss Millie and Letty come to New York from Milborough, Pennsylvania, to keep house for Mr. Benkard. Henry and William Dunn was with him already."

The visitor laughed until his fat body shook.

"I thought that was how it must have tuned out!" he exclaimed. Then his face sobered.

"Mrs. Cayley's afraid to have those letters investigated, for some reason; dread of notoriety, perhaps. There might have been a few things in Benkard's life that wouldn't look good printed in his obituary."

"Yet I shouldn't be s'prised if they was anxious to find out for themselves, anyways, just who it was killed him. Letty kinder hinted they wasn't exactly tickled to death with the district attorney's feller and then she shut up quick. Mebbe there'll be another stranger 'round the place pretty soon who won't flash no badge nor act like he was leadin' a brass band, but I don't see what he kin do; the tracks 'll be all covered up by that time."

"Do you mean you think Mrs. Cayley is going to get a detective of her own out from the city?" demanded the doctor.

"Kinder looks that way, but o' course 'tain't any business o' mine. Seems to me, though, that if I wanted to start on a new

tack and I thought mebbe the feller that writ those letters mightn't have had nothin' to do with the murder after all, I'd have a little talk with 'Zeppa."

"The cook!"

"Seems to me I'd kinder let on what an ornery cuss I thought that district attorney's feller was and that mebbe I'd use my infloence—providin' I had any, that is—to git leave for her to go, seein's she didn't know nothin' about what happened to Mr. Benkard, if she'd tell me what she heard goin' on in the dinin' room last night, after Miss Sherwood had stopped playin' the piano."

Geoff spoke slowly and meditatively, as though communing with himself alone, but his visitor listened eagerly.

"Shouldn't wonder but I'd ask her who the feller was that said he was through; he'd been played for a sucker because the lady hadn't no intentions o' marryin' him, and so now he was goin' to queer Mr. Benkard's game. Reckon she'd tell me that Mr. Benkard threatened to break him like he had the others, but that the feller swore he'd git him first—and that a few minutes after there come the sound of an ottermobile tearin' off down the drive."

"Stoneham Lane! Mrs. Cayley told me that he had a talk with her brother in the dining room just before he left!"

The doctor took off his spectacles and began polishing them vigorously with a corner of the red cotton cover on the table beside which he sat.

"But Benkard went back to the library and talked to her, and then to Miss Sherwood alone for a few minutes after Mrs. Cayley had gone to her room, and old Henry saw him later when he went the rounds to lock the house up for the night!"

"He didn't lock the terrace doors, though, and somebody might've forced the window and inside door to the music room to make it look's if a burglar or leastwise a stranger had done it. Kinder think if this case was any affair o' mine—which it ain't—I'd like to know if Mr. Lane driv' straight back to the city and what time he put his ottermobile up at whatever garage he keeps it at, and then I'd make sure he went home and to bed instead o' mebbe hir-

in' a strange ottermobile or borrowin' one for a little ride out in the country again."

Geoff ran his fingers through his shock of sandy hair, paused for a few moments, then he spoke again.

"It's plumb cur'us how a feller kin go along makin' money and livin' high till he's old 'nough to know better and then git crazy 'bout some yeller-headed little gal who might've been his daughter, and when she won't marry him he'll git an idee that she was leadin' him on because she'd been told to by somebody she had to mind!

"If he'd thought the party that put her up to it was his friend and had p'raps got mixed up in some dirty work with him besides he'd likely git even no matter what it cost him, but if he was scared mebbe that the other party would win out I shouldn't be s'prised but that he'd take a chance on crackin' his skull. Where a feller tries to mix courtin' and business he's bound to lose on one or t'other, and if the business happens to be a little mite crooked there's liable to be a sight o' trouble."

"'Crooked business'?" repeated the visitor thoughtfully. "Those big financiers in Wall Street don't care much who they ruin, Geoff, so long as they get to the top. From what Dunn said to-day, although he was as loyal as they come, I gathered that Benkard was about as ruthless a fighter as any of the lot, but I didn't think he'd do anything crooked."

"Never kin tell, doc." Geoff produced his pipe and sack of tobacco. "O' course if Mis' Cayley does git a detective down it won't be his business to unearth anythin' that 'll mebbe reflect on her brother, but to cover it up instead, and that's where he'd be workin' with his hands tied, but if a body was free to investigate where he pleased he could look up some o' the deals Lane and Benkard have been in together just to git a general idee o' their game."

"Lane ain't nobuddy's fool, for all he wants a gal that don't want him, and if he was to've turned and come back last night he'll have it all fixed to prove where he was every minute o' the time from when he first left here till Mis' Cayley called him on the telephone this mornin', with folks all ready to swear to it, too, likely."

"An alibi, you mean." Dr. Hood nodded a trifle grimly. "If his alibi can't be shaken that's the end of it, but I'll be hanged if I don't think you may have struck it, Geoff! I never thought to talk to that cook; it beats all how you just fall into luck!"

"Reckon it's because I ain't lookin' for nothin'," his host responded as he suddenly put the tobacco sack back in his pocket unopened and reached for a large tin box on the shelf. "Kinder think I'll try this new mixture; too bad I ain't got any cigars for you, doc."

"Mr. Newbury gave me a couple this afternoon." The other took a fat perfecto from his pocket as he spoke. "Those big city lawyers certainly have the best there is."

"'Lawyers'?" Geoff looked up quickly.

"He was Benkard's attorney and Mrs. Cayley's, too, and he came out on the first afternoon train. It seems that Lane left word to have him notified for Mrs. Cayley before he himself started out here. I had a long talk with Newbury about Benkard's affairs and I can tell you if there was anything crooked about them he doesn't know it or he wouldn't have touched them with a ten-foot pole! He's a man of fifty-five or so, I should say, with gray hair and a little pointed beard. Did you ever see him while you were working around the place?"

Geoff shook his head and the doctor went on:

"His voice is deep and solemn, just like a preacher's, and I'll bet he makes them sit up and take notice in a court room! He wanted to know when they could have the body and when I told him 'to-morrow morning,' he said they would have the funeral the next day—Saturday—so as to get it over with as quickly as possible and avoid all the notoriety for the family that they could."

"He seemed pretty well shocked, but it was more as though he felt it a personal scandal and disgrace that one of his clients should have gone and got himself murdered, than any real regret. If Benkard was worth anywhere near as much as he hinted, his fees for settling up the estate ought to run into a tidy sum, though, even

for him, and that must have softened the blow."

"Didn't Benkard leave no will?" Geoff asked, drawing at his pipe slowly.

"Yes, of course. Newbury drew it up for him and he's going to read it to Mrs. Cayley and her daughter on Sunday afternoon. He couldn't tell me in advance what was in it. Benkard wasn't a member of the Stock Exchange himself, but he traded through the biggest houses, and he was known as one of the most daring, brilliant speculators in the Street at the present day.

"He didn't stick to any one kind of stock, but took flyers in everything—railroads and wheat and mines and oil and so forth—and nobody knew which side of the market he'd be on next, sending the price skyrocketing or making the bottom drop out of it."

"Reg'lar gambler," commented Geoff. "Lost out in the end, though, didn't he? No matter how much he made he couldn't take none o' it with him where he went last night! How'd he get his start and when did he first show up down on this here Wall Street? Did Newbury tell you?"

"I don't believe he knows," the doctor replied. "All he said was that Benkard came to him about twelve years ago with a small civil suit, so small that he wouldn't have bothered with it only the young man brought letters of introduction from two of his most important clients. He said that Benkard couldn't have been more than thirty then, but he started right in to direct how he wanted the case handled as though he was giving instructions to some cheap law clerk, and Newbury was astonished at his shrewdness and keen insight.

"He made up his mind to watch him and he was glad to take him on as a regular client, for, though Benkard was only a speculator in a moderate way then, he came up by leaps and bounds until soon everybody was talking about him and trying to follow his moves. If there was anything crooked about his game he was smart enough to keep Newbury from even suspecting it, and I don't see how I can find out what nobody else guessed!"

"Guessin' and provin' are two diff'runt things," Geoff remarked. "I don't know nothin' 'bout specklatin' and I never was

to that there Stock Exchange in my life, but ain't you acquainted with some o' them brokers? Seems to me I heard tell that feller Wyckoff was one, that had the old Middleton place over to the Corners two summers ago. You 'tended his children when they was down with scarlet fever there, didn't you?"

"That's so, I did." The doctor took a last pull at the stub of his cigar and then laid it almost reverently in the saucer which Geoff had placed at his elbow. "I'll run into the city and look him up to-morrow the first thing after I get Benkard's body back home. But what if he was one of the fellows who worked in with Benkard, like Lane?"

"Then o' course he won't give him away on account o' savin' his own skin, but since you're askin' me, I b'lieve I'd git from him as much as I could 'bout some o' the big deals Benkard's worked durin' the last few years, when he sent the stocks whoopin' up and down, and the dates. After that seems to me I'd look up the names o' firms that failed round those times, if they was any, and I'd go see the heads o' them; they'd talk fast 'nough, likely, if they was anythin' to say." Geoff paused.

"Dunno 'zackly how I'd go 'bout it to find 'em, but old newspapers would have the 'nouncement o' the failures in 'em, and I'd write down the names and then mebber go ask round in brokers' offices if they knowed what had become o' them. Shouldn't be s'prised if I found one or two, like Dunn, workin' for other folks on this here Wall Street. It's gamblin', that there business, no matter what name you call it by, and I've took notice that the losers will hang round doin' any old odd jobs just to see the play when once the gamblin' fever gits in their blood."

"And I was going to send in my report on the autopsy to the district attorney to-morrow and wash my hands of the case!" Dr. Hood struck his plump, rounded knee with his fist. "Why, I hadn't even begun to go into it! I'll get a man from headquarters in New York to look up Lane's movements from the time he drove away from Mrs. Cayley's house last night until he came down this morning in response to

her telephone call, and have him bring me his report on it, and if there is a loophole anywhere I'll make Lane produce an alibi.

"In the meantime I'll find out all I can about his and Benkard's deals, and see Wyckoff and perhaps get a line on some other brokers or speculators who failed and who may hold a grudge against Benkard, like that fellow Dunn told about to-day who tried to shoot him. You heard that from the pantry, didn't you?"

"Yes. Seems to me Dunn could tell a lot more if he was a mind to."

"I'll bet he could, but Mrs. Cayley probably raised old Ned with him to-day for talking as much as he did after I'd questioned her about those letters, and he'll be afraid to open his mouth. Still, if Lane can prove an alibi I may be able to discover some one in Wall Street who's held a grudge against Benkard for four and a half years, and who might have written those letters, and *he'll* have to prove an alibi, too!"

The doctor rose.

"I stopped by to-night to talk things over with you, Geoff, because I thought you might have picked up something that I hadn't about this case, but I never dreamed for a second that you had anything up your sleeve as important as that quarrel and the threats that were exchanged between Lane and Benkard! Why on earth didn't you come and tell me at once?"

"Because 'twasn't none o' my business," Geoff replied slowly. "Wait till I light the lantern outside so's you can see your way 'long the path to the road, doc."

He preceded his visitor out on the little porch, and as the rays of the lantern streamed forth the doctor held out his hand to the stonemason.

"Well, you've helped an awful lot, Geoff, and I'm mighty obliged to you. See you to-morrow. Good night."

Geoff remained on the porch until he heard the rattle of the ancient car out on the main road. Then he extinguished the lantern, and reëntering the kitchen he closed the door carefully behind him. Taking from his pocket the tobacco sack he had all but opened in his visitor's presence, he drew from it the scrap of soft, resilient, black

fabric and gazed at it reflectively for a long space.

At length the injured dog in the corner stirred, and Geoff looked over at her.

"Lady," he remarked, "I wonder if I done right; if I helped."

CHAPTER VII.

FROM OUT THE SAND.

AT eight o'clock the next morning while Geoff was mixing concrete and whistling his monotonously unchanging refrain a black motor car of unmistakable lines drove slowly in at the gate and up to the front door. From where he stood beside the Cayleys' unfinished garage he could get a straightaway view of the main drive, and his whistling ceased while involuntarily his hand went up to the cap upon his head. For the last time Joseph Benkard was returning to the home of his sister.

Then the mason shook his head stubbornly to himself, replaced the cap, and turning his back went deliberately on with his work. It was up to the family, not him, to show respect for their dead.

He heard the car drive away, empty, at a more brisk pace, and a few minutes thereafter came the sound of a second motor, the familiar clatter of Hank's station jitney. Geoff turned once more and stood staring while it passed the corner of the house front, turned, halted, and in another moment reappeared, gathering speed as it lurched wildly toward the gates.

He caught just a glimpse of a commanding figure with gray hair showing beneath an immaculate straw hat, and a small pointed gray beard. From Doc Hood's description that could be none other than Mr. Newbury, the family lawyer, and he was evidently in some haste to get to town.

Geoff had bent to his task again when a genial voice hailed him and he looked up to find himself confronted by a red-haired, freckle-faced young man who stood with his hat on the back of his head and his hands in his pockets regarding him with an infectiously good-natured smile.

"Hello, Buddie! You the whole works around here?" he asked.

"Looks like it, don't it?"

The answering friendliness in Geoff's tone offset the bluntness of the reply, but his mild brown eyes narrowed slightly. Fresh young city feller in cheap store clothes nosing around where he had no business to be and asking fool questions— scrape acquaintance. There could be only one explanation of his presence, and he was probably the forerunner of a whole crew. Geoff went on mixing concrete.

"Sure does!" The young man balanced himself nonchalantly on the edge of the wheelbarrow. "Been here since the job started?"

"Off and on."

"Were you here yesterday morning when Mr. Benkard's body was found? There must have been a lot of excitement around the place!" The young man's tone grew wheedling. "Tell us about it, like a good fellow."

"Ain't nothin' to tell. I didn't see no excitement. Folks kept comin' and goin', but it wasn't none o' my business, and that's 'bout all I got time for."

Geoff spoke with good-humored emphasis, but the other was impervious to hints.

"Didn't you get a look at the body before it was moved? What was the first you knew of the murder? See here, I'll make it worth your while—"

"Young man," Geoff straightened and eyed him blandly, "the only thing that's worth my while right now is to git this concrete into the molds before she sets, and I've got to have that wheelbarrow to do it. Reckon you better be goin' on 'bout your business, too, whatever 't is, or Zeke Foster, the police lieutenant that's comin' down the drive might mistake you for one o' these here city reporter fellers, and he's death on 'em."

"Right-o! Thanks for the tip." The freckled youth slid off the barrow, grinning cheerfully even in defeat. "You think it over, and if you'd like to talk to me when you knock off for dinner, I'll be down by that tourists' soft-drink stand on the main road."

The red head disappeared among the trees in the direction of the hedge. Zeke Foster had gone around the other side of

the house, and Geoff resumed his piping whistle when again a voice greeted him, this time in low, rich, feminine tones.

"Good morning, Geoffrey."

He turned quickly, removing his cap, for Mrs. Cayley's guest, Vera Sherwood, stood before him. She was clad in a soft, gray gown, and her face was colorless as marble, but the mass of red-brown hair glowed like molten copper in the sun.

"Good mornin', ma'am." Geoff gave her one of his rare smiles. "I hope I ain't disturbin' folks up at the house by workin' round out here, but when I start a job I like to git through with it."

"I think most of us do." She smiled faintly in reply. "I haven't heard any one complain, although of course you have done no work inside."

"I puttered round a mite yestiddy fixin' up things here and there while the folks was all busy havin' conferences, 'cause I reckoned the court ought to look as good's it could in case there was a big funeral; Mis' Cayley told me not to go on with the terrace yet, so I started out here in the afternoon."

His bovine eyes were fixed on her inquiringly as though anxious for commendation on this thoughtfulness, but she shook her head.

"There won't be any funeral ceremony here, I understand. Mr. Benkard's body is to be removed very quietly." She paused. "The notoriety—Mrs. Cayley has been much annoyed already by reporters and curious strangers."

"One o' them there reporter fellers come snoopin' round out here just now," remarked Geoff. "Didn't git nothin' out o' me, though, ma'am; 'tain't my business."

"I know Mrs. Cayley will appreciate your not talking to any of them. The local police lieutenant has been instructed to keep them off the place. Oh!"

Miss Sherwood caught herself up with a little catch in her breath and stood staring as though she could scarcely believe her eyes. Geoff followed the direction of her gaze and saw a tall athletic figure striding toward them across the lawn. He appeared to be a man in the early thirties, and although he was a stranger, there seemed

something familiar in the smooth-shaven, clean-cut features and eager, boyish blue eyes which brought a vague impression to the stonemason's mind. It deepened to a certainty as the newcomer neared them, and he smiled to himself once more and then turned and moved off out of sight.

"Adrian!" Miss Sherwood exclaimed in a low, agitated tone. "I—I thought you were in Canada!"

"I reached home last night. Georgette told me of—of what had taken place out here, and I found her all packed up and waiting, and this morning we came out and opened up the old Manor House at the Corners. You've never seen it, but Harper and I were born and grew up there, you know, until we went to college.

"Georgette thought there might be formalities connected with this horrible affair which would make it necessary for any one who had been in the house when it happened to remain in the neighborhood for a few days at least, and she won't hear of your staying on here another hour."

His voice was firm, but there was an unmistakably revealing note of tenderness in it which told its own story. "I've come to take you home."

"Now? Oh, Adrian, I couldn't! As the only outsider, the only guest at the time, it is inevitable that I shall come in for a certain share of questioning and notoriety, and I cannot drag your sister-in-law into it, as kind as she has been to me."

Real distress made the young woman's rich tones quiver.

"I must think of Mrs. Cayley, too; she has only her daughter, a mere girl, and I could not leave her alone in this terrible hour after accepting her invitation to visit her here!"

"I don't see why you did!" Adrian exclaimed impulsively. "You're not an intimate friend of hers, and they were never in our set in town. Oh, my dear, I am not criticizing your actions or your choice of associates, but it maddens me to think of your being connected, however remotely, with the hideous mess and scandal this case is bound to be before it is settled!"

"That is all the more reason why I would not think of going to Georgette now;

but I fail to see why you should draw such a conclusion, Adrian. A—a frightful tragedy has taken place, certainly; but why you think a hideous scandal must ensue—"

She spoke in warningly cold accents, but her companion was too vehemently in earnest to heed.

"Because I knew the man's reputation! I knew what was whispered about him on the Street, what is being shouted now from the housetops! Have you seen the papers this morning? Do you know that one despicable yellow sheet had the audacity to hint that *you*—that a possible engagement might—"

"Adrian!" Indignation and a sort of shocked horror rang in her tones, but before she could speak again the cheerful reiteration of a whistled refrain sounded from the rear, and Geoff marched around the corner of the garage. He hesitated in awkward embarrassment, and his eyes traveled from the couple standing before him to his concrete mixing paraphernalia as if he were uncertain what to do.

Miss Sherwood's pale face flushed vividly, and she moved as though to retreat, but her companion stood staring at the mason.

"Haven't I seen you before?" he asked. "I mean, aren't you a native hereabout? I used to live near a good many years ago."

Geoff chuckled.

"Reckon you've seen me, all right, Mr. Middleton," he replied. "I was speakin' o' your old home only last night, at least o' the folks you rented it to a couple o' year back. When you and your brother was kids we all used to go swimmin' down behind the big rock—"

"And once when I was taken with a cramp you fished me out and saved my life!" Adrian Middleton advanced with outstretched hand. "You're Geoffrey Peters! Good Lord, after all these years! I'm mighty glad to see you again."

"Same here, Mr. Middleton."

Geoff wiped his plaster-smeared hand on his overalls and clasped the one extended to him.

"I heard tell that your brother had died four or five year ago; he was a mite older than you or me, but I recollect him 's if it was yestiddy."

"Yes. His widow came down this morning to open the old house for the summer. Miss Sherwood and she live together in New York, you know. Just think, Vera, we played with each other when we were kids!"

He turned to her and she smiled warmly. "So I gathered," she said. "I knew that Geoffrey was a native here."

"You've gone on with your father's old trade, I see." Middleton glanced comprehensively about him and then back to Geoff. "Our place needs fixing up, and my sister-in-law will want a lot of work done. As soon as your job here is finished, or you can get away, if it isn't too far to the Corners—"

"'Twasn't too far when your ma used to give treats for the village kids, and I reckon there ain't nobuddy I'd ruther work for now than any folks o' yours," Geoff responded. "Dunno how soon I kin git away here, but whenever the contractor sends out a new gang o' his own men I'll go over and see what Mrs. Harper Middleton wants done."

"Fine! You'll find Miss Sherwood there, too, and I'll probably be down. Miss Sherwood is coming home to-day."

The last remark was obviously intended for the benefit of the young woman, but she shook her head, smiling wanly.

"Not so long as Mrs. Cayley needs me here, Adrian."

She spoke with a finality which brooked no denial, and turned to the house and Middleton prepared to follow.

"Don't forget, Geoffrey, as soon as you can leave here! That old place of ours will keep you busy for the rest of the summer!"

He strode off, and the mason stood gazing after them with a soft light glowing deep in his eyes until they had mounted the terrace steps and disappeared within. Then in an absent-minded fashion he returned to his work once more; but he whistled no longer, and the concrete molds filled slowly.

No two-faced Letty appeared to offer enticing refreshments at noon, and Geoff consumed his dinner in peace under the shade of a near-by tree, then wandered down toward the boathouse. It struck him as odd that he had caught no glimpse of young

Rupert Ashe hanging about the place, and it occurred to him that the boy might be waiting at the last rendezvous in the hope of being able to communicate with Mildred Cayley.

The place was silent and deserted, however, and he had started to retrace his steps when on the farther side of the boathouse, high up on the strip of beach near where it merged into a growth of rank, coarse grasses a tiny heap of driftwood piled up as no steamer's backwash would have left it met his eye. He sauntered over to it and idly kicked the sticks and bits of board aside, to find beneath them a low mound of sand no bigger than his two hands, but packed down tightly as though something had been buried there.

Curious, he knelt and began to dig, but a few scoops with the flat piece of wood which he had picked up to serve as a shovel brought to light that which made him sit back on his heels with a gasp of surprise. It was just a soft wad of some glossy, black fabric, but when he finally pulled it out and unrolled it a gaping rent appeared in its surface, a jagged tear into which that scrap in his tobacco sack at home would have fitted with nice exactitude.

Geoff stuffed it inside his shirt, and glancing around him, he rose, scuffing the sand about until the shallow hole was completely filled. There was a look of stern gravity on his face as he strode hastily along the back path which would lead out behind the garage. There was an expression almost of pain in his kindly eyes, but his jaw was set resolutely. When he reached his destination he took up his work again doggedly, ignoring the unsightly bulge on his chest beneath the coarse shirt.

Well on toward the middle of the afternoon a smart sedan rolled up the driveway to the house front with a sedate chauffeur in dark livery behind the wheel. Geoff could not discern whether it carried one or more passengers, and in a few minutes it departed in the direction of the village.

If it were seeking Jake's service station, and the public garage adjoining, the indications were that the new arrival or arrivals intended to remain, but the solitary worker did not go near the house. It was

none of his business, and moreover curiosity had led him into assuming enough responsibility for one day.

He continued his labors uninterruptedly until the six o'clock whistles blew, but Dr. Hood did not put in an appearance, and at last he made everything shipshape for his return the following morning, and started for home. A few yards beyond the gates, however, the medical examiner's disreputable little car came in sight, and Geoff waited until it had pulled up beside him.

"Phew! I've had a day of it, Geoff!" the doctor exclaimed. "How's everything been going up there?"

He nodded toward the Cayley estate, and Geoff responded:

"Dunno, doc. I ain't been up to the house at all, but worked steady on the garage. Zeke Foster didn't come a nigh me, he was busy keeping folks off the place that hadn't no business to be there, but one slipped past him and tackled me—a young reporter feller from the city. I got shut o' him quick, though, and then that lady visitor, Miss Sherwood, come along and stopped to say 'good mornin'.' Real pleasant-spoken, she is, with no more airs than if she'd been livin' here to the Cove all her life. Have you talked with her?"

"I saw her for a few minutes yesterday—just long enough to have her corroborate Mrs. Cayley's story of how they all spent the evening before the murder. She didn't hear anything during the night, she said, and only knew what had happened when Letty came up to break the news to Mrs. Cayley. Miss Sherwood's a mighty handsome young woman," the doctor commented. "Was she the only one of the household you had any conversation with, Geoff? What's become of Sergeant Eliot?"

"Ain't laid eyes on him all day, nor on any o' the folks from the house except Miss Sherwood; but while she was talkin' to me a fine-lookin' city feller come to see her, and who do you s'pose 'twas?"

Geoff described the meeting with Adrian Middleton and their mutual recognition; also the conversation which he had overheard from the rear of the garage. The doctor listened attentively until its conclusion. Then he remarked:

"I read that article in the paper hinting at what it called 'a budding romance between the financier and a charming society girl who is reported to be a guest at his sister's home, where the murder took place.' That was all; it didn't mention her name there, but an earlier paragraph had given a list of every one known to have been in the house at the approximate time of the tragedy, so it might as well have come out with it. Middleton seemed pretty indignant about it, from what you say—jealous, eh?"

"Kinder looks more to me 's if he hated the idee o' a friend gittin' in the scandal." Geoff pushed back his cap and scratched his head reflectively. "There's one thing sure; he didn't have no use for Benkard. Did you find that feller Wyckoff and git any notion from him 'bout how Benkard and Lane have been workin' their deals, doc; and was there any failures 'long 'bout the time they made any big killin's?"

"I found Wyckoff," Dr. Hood replied slowly, and a certain grim expression came over his round, genial countenance. "He isn't a member of the Stock Exchange any more; he's clerking in another brokerage house, and his children, who used to run wild and as happy as the day was long over the old Middleton place, are cooped up in a Bronx flat. Benkard ruined him."

"Land o' Liberty!" Geoff's jaw dropped and his habitual drawl vanished. "To think we should 'a' picked out him to go to! When did it happen? Was Lane mixed up in it?"

"No. It was just after that summer down here. Wyckoff's not like Dunn; he's a fighter, and if there had been anything illegal about the business Benkard would have been behind the bars now instead of in his coffin. It was worse, Geoff; it was an abuse of friendship!

"Wyckoff trusted him, accepted his tips, passed them on to his customers and found himself all at once on the wrong side of the market. Then the crash came. That was Benkard's secret of success; to win the confidence of a lot of the less important brokers who catered to small speculators by letting them know in advance the truth about what he and his crowd was going to do, and

they would follow his lead and make money for a time. Then, without warning, he would betray them and wipe them out! And the law couldn't touch him!"

"I ain't s'prised none," observed Geoff dryly. "Kinder had the opinion Benkard was that sort o' feller. But if it happened once you wouldn't 'a' thought anybuddy would trust him so's he could work it again."

"That's the worst of it; no one believes the man who fails, they think he's just a poor loser and tryin' to put the responsibility on somebody else!"

The doctor's voice was stern.

"I got the names of two other firms Wyckoff says went under because of Benkard, but I couldn't locate the heads of them. Robbins & Boone, one was, and Lang & Lacey. I got enough from Wyckoff, anyway, about the past. He told me a funny thing, too, that I can't just fit in with the rest of it; until about a year ago Lane and Benkard were bitter enemies; not personal ones, but in their trading. For years each has been trying to push the other to the wall, and then all of a sudden—nobody knows how nor why—they got together, and they've been hand in glove ever since.

"If they're doing anything actually crooked, I couldn't get a line on it. Wyckoff sent me to another broker who might know, but I had to wait until after the market closed to see him, and then he either couldn't or wouldn't talk. I tried to look up some other folks Wyckoff told me about, and that's what kept me so late, but they were out of town."

"'Tain't my business, but if 'twas I reckon I'd like to know what made Benkard and Lane friendly after fightin' each other for so long. 'Tain't in human nater onless there's somethin' back o' it."

Geoff rested one of his capacious feet on the running board.

"Did you git anybuddy to find out 'bout what Lane did after he driv' away madder'n a wet hen on the night o' the murder?"

"Yes. I stopped in at police headquarters and they put a man on it for me," replied the doctor. "He's driving out in a car to meet me around eleven to-night down by the picnic grove. Want to come along? You were the first to get an idea that Lane might have come back night before last, and I'd be glad to have your opinion."

"'S long as you ask me, I'd kinder like to hear what he has to say. 'Course he needn't to know, doc, that I'm just workin' round the place and ain't got nothin' to do with your case."

Geoff paused, and he did not see the fat little doctor smile to himself in the gathering dusk. He added suddenly: "That lawyer feller, Newbury, went to town right after the body was brought back this morning."

"He took the same train I did, but he didn't see me!" Dr. Hood chuckled. "I was careful to keep out of his sight, and when we got to the city I trailed him! First time in all my experience I ever tried that, but it wasn't so hard, because he wasn't suspecting anything. You were right, Geoff, though how you figured it out from just a hint of that Letty's beats me! Where do you think he went? Straight to O'Hare's Private Detective Agency!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

THE EYEWITNESS

By CURTIS BENTON

will be our Complete Novelette next week, an unusually absorbing tale of crime detection by an author who has already registered success with his short stories.



The Adventures of Peabody Smith

By WILLIAM J. FLYNN,
Former Chief, United States Secret Service,
and GEORGE BARTON.

IV.—THE PERSISTENCE OF PERCIVAL JAYNE.

THE mystery surrounding the Hodge case might never have been dispelled if it had not been for the persistence of Percival Jayne, the younger member of the banking firm of Hodge & Jayne. He it was who followed every step in the solution of the puzzle with a fascinated interest that was almost sordid in its intensity. It brought out an unexpected side of his character. In the small world of finance Jayne was noted for his thoroughness in getting to the heart of a prob-

lem. In the early stages of the Hodge tragedy it was felt that he was urged on and on by this same characteristic.

The thing that upset so many well-ordered lives happened late in the afternoon of the last day of the then old year. Percival Jayne had an appointment to meet Hodge at the country home of the banker at Hedgewater. They were closing up the business, and the venerable man had made all arrangements for turning over his share in the business to the young financier.

The first story of this series appeared in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 28.

It was to be a gift—a New Year's present well worth receiving. Jayne arrived precisely at the hour appointed—four thirty in the afternoon. He pressed the electric button with a smile on his lips, and the door was opened by the butler, who burst into tears at sight of his visitor.

"Why, Ambrose," exclaimed Jayne, "what in the world is the matter?"

The answer came in one expressive and dramatic sentence:

"Mr. Hodge has been murdered—he's lying dead on the floor of the sun room!"

Percival Jayne acted with promptness and decision. He asked for no details; he did not even pause to look at the body, but, going to the long-distance telephone, he summoned Peabody Smith, the famous investigator, late of the United States Secret Service, and now retired after years of fine service. Peabody had once run down a bond theft for the banking firm, and he was acquainted with Hodge, and the young partner begged him to come down to Hedgewater on the score of friendship. He hesitated for the fraction of a minute, but ended by accepting, and promised to hurry down on the next train. And when that train pulled in at the quiet rural town he was the first man to alight.

It was an agitated Percival Jayne who poured his tale into the ears of Peabody Smith as they rode the short distance between the railway station and the country home of the dead banker. The young financier was haggard and distracted; there were dark lines under his big black eyes, and his well-manicured hands trembled.

The veteran detective was calm, cool and collected. He looked more like a retired business man than a professional thief catcher, and the red carnation in his buttonhole and the opal in the old-rose tie gave him a debonair appearance that just escaped the suspicion of rakishness.

"But, Jayne," he protested, "you have the local police down here. What was the big idea in dragging me out of my well-earned retirement?"

"Because you knew the old man," was the fervent reply, "and because you are the one man that can solve the mystery. The chief of police is at the house already,

but I want you because I'm sure you will leave no stone unturned."

The car turned into a graveled driveway, and the two men found themselves in the portico of the Hodge homestead. The shadow of death was visible on every side. It was paraded in the expression of the solemn-faced butler who admitted them, and in the drawn shades in all of the windows. Peabody and Jayne walked rapidly through the corridors to the officelike addition at the far side of the house. Two objects informed the detective that he was at the scene of the crime. The first was the silent form under a white sheet in the corner of the room; the second was a red-faced, fidgety, very-much-alive individual who came to meet them.

"Hello, Kelly!" exclaimed Peabody. "I see that you are on the job."

The chief of police of Hedgewater nodded stiffly.

"Yes," he growled; "keeping it warm and getting ready to play second fiddle to you."

The detective conjured up his most engaging smile.

"I'm just a friend of the family," he said soothingly and with gentlemanly mendacity. "It's your case, Kelly, and I only ask the privilege of helping to the extent of my ability."

The official vanity was appeased. The local dignitary thawed out at once. "I'm really glad to have you, Mr. Smith. I got here ten minutes after the body was found, and not a thing in the room has been disturbed. I heard you'd been called in, and I thought you'd like to start your own way. Besides," with a grin, "if I haven't done anything you can't accuse me of pullin' any bones."

Jayne asked to be excused, and as he did so Peabody Smith got down on one knee and lifted the sheet from the body. Samuel Hodge looked more impressive in death than he had in life. The face, rigid now, seemed as though it had been carved by a sculptor. With practical swiftness the detective took in every detail of the inanimate form. An ugly bruise on the left side of the temple indicated that it had been struck with some hard substance.

Smith, pausing for a moment, looked about him. The room was in disorder, as though a struggle had preceded death. The drawer of a roll-topped desk was slightly open.

"What do you make of it?" he asked his colleague.

Chief Kelly reflectively rubbed the palm of his brawny hand across his broad, blue-black chin.

"Burglary," he said finally. "You'll notice that the glass window in that doorway has been smashed. Besides, four hundred dollars have been taken from that drawer."

"How do you know?"

"Because Jayne tells me the old man cashed a check for that amount in order to make presents to-morrow. He kept his money in that drawer. It's all gone now."

"I see," said Smith assentingly, but still keeping his eyes on the prostrate form on the floor.

What he saw was an expensive diamond pin in the tie of the dead man, and a handsome gold watch chain hanging from the pocket of his waistcoat. If robbery was the motive, how did it come that the murderer had left valuables that could be had for the taking?

Presently the detective arose and made a second survey of the room. He gave a particular scrutiny to the floor. Not a square inch of it escaped his keen eyes. The net result of his search was two ragged bits of parchmentlike paper—the sort of paper that is used in legal documents. He deposited them carefully in his large wallet, and placed that in turn in the breast pocket of his coat. Kelly watched the performance curiously.

"Blank pieces of paper," he commented disdainfully.

"They are not to be despised, chief," retorted the detective. "You must not forget that the greatest war in the world's history was caused by contempt for what was called a 'scrap of paper.'"

"War isn't the same as murder."

"I should say that it was murder on a wholesale scale. But that's neither here nor there. Tell me, who are the people in the house?"

"Well," said Kelly, "there is Miss Allen, Hodge's niece; Ambrose Berrello, the butler; Mrs. Harkins, the housekeeper; and Jim Moody, the chauffeur. Mrs. Harkins was out when the thing happened, and Moody was fired this morning."

"Have you talked with any of them?"

"Yes, and their stories all agree. Hodge was alone in this room for a long while, going over business matters. At twenty minutes after four the butler was passing and looked in and found the old man on the floor."

Peabody Smith was not yet through with the officelike apartment in which Samuel Hodge had been killed. He moved rapidly around the sparsely furnished room. There was a roll-topped desk against the wall, and in front of it a swivel chair. The desk was closed and the chair had evidently been thrown out of place. If there had been a struggle, it must have been brief. There were two windows looking out on the lawn, and a doorway containing two large panes of glass. One of these panes had been broken. Smith got down on his hands and knees and minutely examined the shattered glass.

Kelly watched him closely.

"That's how the fellow got in," declared the Hedgewater man. "When he smashed the pane of glass it gave him the chance to put his hand through the window and open the door."

"That sounds reasonable," agreed Smith, but he still remained on the floor examining the broken glass with fascinated interest.

The door was closed. After a while the detective opened it and, going outside, stooped down and closely scrutinized the ground. It seemed as though he would never finish the examination. Kelly was visibly restless. He could not understand why the detective should spend so much time on an obvious thing. But, as he nervously paced to and fro, he made a discovery that caused him to shout with joy.

"Look out there!" he cried with ill-concealed impatience, pointing to the snow-covered ground.

"What is it?" asked Smith with a foolish grin.

"Footprints!" exclaimed Kelly. "Foot-

prints all the way from the house to the garage."

It was as he said. A light snow had fallen that morning, and the telltale marks were there with a distinctness that could not be overlooked by the most obtuse detector of crime. Smith did not ignore them. On the contrary, he gave them the most careful attention. They were large footprints, and the center of each one was filled with little lines. The snow had been slightly stained with mud, but in spite of that the tiny crisscross marks were perfectly visible.

Smith followed them slowly until they reached to the very door of the garage. He went into the little frame building, but found nothing unusual there. A door on the other side opened out on to a graveled path, and beyond this the snow-covered lawn sloped down to the river bank. The path, which led in a circular direction to the house, was barren of snow. The tiny flakes had evidently melted as fast as they fell on the stones.

The detective returned to the officelike room in a reflective frame of mind, but as he entered he paused once again to examine the broken glass.

Half an hour later he was gently questioning May Allen, the niece of the dead man. She was a frail little body, apparently all but crushed by the awful tragedy that had suddenly entered her life. She sat in a great upholstered chair, her blue eyes fastened on the detective, trying hard to compose her feelings and intelligently answer his questions.

"Miss Allen," began Peabody in the low voice with which one might address a little child, "do you know whether Mr. Hodge had any enemies in this part of the country?"

"I don't think he had an enemy in the world," she answered with a pathetic show of spirit. "Everybody in this house loved him, and he was liked by all the neighbors."

"Has anything happened lately that might lead to this—to this tragedy?"

"Not to my knowledge," she answered.

"We have all been talking lately about robberies in the neighborhood. There have

been a number of holdups and crimes of that kind."

Smith paused for a while, then resumed quietly:

"I am told that Moody, the chauffeur, was dismissed this morning. Do you know why?"

"He was not dismissed. He was laid off for the winter. That was an odd notion of uncle's. Heretofore he has kept him all the year round. But you know he was retiring from business this year, and he probably thought it an unnecessary expense, as he used the car very little during the winter."

"Has Moody been with your uncle long?"

"About ten years."

"How did he take his—lay-off?"

Miss Allen hesitated a moment before replying. When she spoke it was in a reluctant manner. "Very badly, I am sorry to say. He complained, saying that he was being badly treated after all of his years of faithful service. Uncle answered him shortly, and then Moody became abusive."

"Did he make threats?"

"Yes," she answered in her subdued manner. "He threatened to get even."

At this stage in the examination Percival Jayne entered the room, still very pale, but more composed than when he had greeted Peabody at the station.

The detective called to him. "Mr. Jayne," he said, "I suppose you can give us a good description of Moody, the chauffeur?"

"Certainly—but I'm afraid you're wasting time in going after him. Moody had his faults, but he would never be guilty of anything like this."

"Maybe not, but kindly give the description to Chief Kelly there, and he will know what to do with it."

The head of the police stepped aside and listened to the description given him by the banker. Five minutes later he was on the telephone, talking to the metropolitan police. Before the hour had struck, the police of two hundred cities were combing their districts in the effort to locate the dismissed chauffeur.

Mrs. Harkins, the housekeeper, was next

placed on the grill, but every time she spoke, as has been said of an eminent statesman, she subtracted from the sum of human knowledge. Mrs. Harkins wept constantly and wrung her hands, and rocked to and fro, and persisted in telling of the effect the tragedy had on her nervous system. She was mortally offended when she was asked to "keep to the point," because she felt that the chief purpose of the inquiry must be to ascertain the state of her personal feelings. Smith dropped her with a sigh of relief, and called for Ambrose Berrello, the butler.

Berrello was a man with a smooth-shaven face, and coal-black eyes that smoldered in their sockets beneath a pair of bushy eyebrows. He was a perfect type of the well-trained servant, with his emotions well under control. Yet his slightest movement was expressive. The rolling of those wonderful eyes spoke volumes, and the merest shrug of his broad shoulders conveyed endless possibilities. He talked fluently, clearly, but always with the air of one who answers all questions fully without volunteering information.

Yes, he was born and raised in Italy; likewise it was true that he was connected with patriotic organizations in that country; nor did he deny that he was affiliated with certain secret societies in the United States. But he had always tried to do his duty toward Mr. Hodge. He said that he had passed the little room about four o'clock, and noticed his employer engaged in going over some papers. He was positive that Mr. Hodge was alone in the office at ten minutes after four, because he had looked at his watch at the time. At twenty minutes after four he discovered his employer lying dead on the floor.

"Now, Ambrose," said Peabody, "did you notice anything in particular about the appearance of the room when you passed the first time?"

The Italian was silent for some moments. "The first time," he commented thoughtfully, "the lid of the desk was open, and the last time it was closed."

"Well," remarked the detective, "the only significance about that might have been that Mr. Hodge, having completed his

business, might have naturally closed his desk."

The mention of the desk suggested the desirability of examining its contents. The key was missing, and could not be found. Without any ceremony it was broken open. Everything was found in order, indicating the careful habits of the owner. On the blotter was a sheet of legal paper. It was signed and witnessed, and it transferred Mr. Hodge's interest in his banking business to Percival Jayne, without any consideration whatever, and as a reward of years of faithful service.

That practically closed the case for the day.

II.

It was at the earnest invitation of Percival Jayne that Smith remained at the Hedgewater house overnight. The two men sat up late, and it was while they were smoking their final cigar that the young financier asked the detective what progress he had made.

He was told of the various discoveries, and, for the first time, a smile of satisfaction appeared upon his haggard face. "I knew you'd get down to it," he said. "It seems to me you've got a complete case already."

"It's far from complete—and, besides, we haven't got the man yet."

Jayne nodded comprehendingly. "That is true. Are there ever cases where they fail to get the man?"

"Well," said Smith cautiously, "I have heard of such cases."

The young man paused to light his cigar, which had gone out. When he spoke again it was in a challenging tone of voice. "If that be true, what becomes of the contention that murder will out?"

"I hardly know," confessed the detective slowly, "but I suppose in some way, and at some time, every crime is discovered."

"I don't believe it," was the sharp rejoinder. "In my opinion that is simply an old copybook maxim that will not bear analysis. It's like that ancient theory of the victim's blood flowing when the body is touched by the assassin. That's rank su-

persuade, and nobody takes any stock in it nowadays. But even yet some people are fooled by the science of deduction and such nonsense."

Smith was surprised at the earnestness of the attack. He smiled at Percival Jayne. "And in the face of all this you call on me to solve the mystery of Samuel Hodge's death?"

"Well," exclaimed the young man, "you are on trial as far as this case is concerned! You have not one but several clews. Will you solve the mystery?"

"Time will tell," grinned the old man.

"Maybe it will," replied the skeptic. "But I'm sure of one thing: if you don't discover the murderer, no other man will."

Smith rose to prepare to retire. "Percival," he said gravely, "that's the nicest thing you've said to-night, and I believe you mean every word of it."

III.

SHORTLY after breakfast the next morning Kelly returned to the house in a state of great excitement. The river tide, just below the Hodge home, had washed up a pair of muddy rubber shoes. The local policeman carried them to Smith wrapped in a newspaper. He turned them over to the detective with pride glowing from his eyes.

"They may mean nothing," he said, "or they may mean everything. It's up to you to say."

Peabody Smith was intently interested in this new exhibit. He cautioned his fellow worker to keep the news of the discovery from every one in the house, and, at the same time, contrived to get several pairs of old shoes belonging to the various members of the household.

The next proceeding was to compare the shoes of Ambrose Berrello with the strange rubbers. It was found that the rubber would not go over the butler's shoe. The one was at least two sizes larger than the other. The final test was in the garage. The footgear of the chauffeur was tested. His shoes were so big that it would have been a physical impossibility to have covered them with the rubbers.

"Well," sighed Smith, "we'll have to compare the rubbers with the footprints between the house and the garage."

The policeman and the detective started at the work in a more or less perfunctory manner; but they had not gone far when both experienced the thrill that comes with the discovery of a clew. The rubbers fitted precisely into the footprints. More than that, the rough soles of the rubbers produced exactly the kind of crisscross marks that had been found on the snow-covered lawn.

Smith and Kelly looked at one another significantly.

"We're getting warmer!" exclaimed the Hedgewater man with a smile that threatened to extend from ear to ear.

"We're certainly fairly warm for such a cold day," agreed the detective as he rose from the ground.

While they were talking the door of the house opened, and Miss Allen came out on the lawn.

Smith walked over to meet her, holding the odd bit of evidence behind him. "Miss Allen," he said gently, "I do not want to startle you, but would like you to give me some information."

"I'll be glad to tell you all I know," she replied with a slight catch in her voice.

The detective produced the rubbers and held them in front of the girl with something like a dramatic flourish. "Did you ever see these shoes before?" he asked.

She leaned over and scrutinized the muddy rubbers very attentively.

The tears came to her eyes. "They—they are the rubbers that were worn by Mr. Hodge. He kept them in his little office almost constantly."

"You are certain?"

"Positive," was the reply. "I could not mistake them. We often laughed at Uncle Samuel for wearing such old-fashioned things."

"That is all, Miss Allen," said the detective. "We will not trouble you any further."

Five minutes later Smith and Kelly were alone in the officelike room. They stared at one another in silence for many moments.

"Well," exclaimed the policeman impatiently, "I thought you would be pleased! What's the matter?"

"Matter enough!" ejaculated Smith. "We've discovered something, but it leaves me more puzzled than ever."

"Why?" asked the other blankly.

"Can't you see? They are undoubtedly the rubbers that made the marks on the snow. But how could they have been worn by Hodge? How could a dead man walk from the house to the garage?"

"I don't know," was the feeble reply, "unless he walked across the lawn before he was killed."

"Walked, fiddlesticks! And even if he did, how is it that they found themselves in the river? Hodge was not the kind of man to throw away his belongings; he was too careful for that. Thrift was his middle name, and, as you see, these rubbers are not worn out. We've found something new, but all it has done is to thicken the plot."

A telephone call prevented further discussion of that point. It brought important information. Jim Moody, the chauffeur, had been arrested and was being brought to Hedgewater. He arrived half an hour later in the custody of a plain-clothes man from the city. He was a young man with traces of dissipation on a rather good-looking face. Smith brought him into the death chamber and proceeded to cross-examine him.

"You were dismissed yesterday morning," said the detective, "and before you quit the house you talked to Mr. Hodge in a threatening manner."

"That is true," was the frightened response, "but I didn't mean anything by it. I'm sorry, because Mr. Hodge treated me decently, and I wouldn't harm him for the world. I was in a rage at the time, but what I said was just hot air."

"But you see the position it places you in now?"

"I do, but I'll swear that I hadn't anything to do with his death."

"Moody, I'm going to ask you a question, and I want a truthful answer. Did you leave the premises at once, or did you linger around here?"

The chauffeur hesitated a moment, then he threw out his hands impulsively and exclaimed:

"I stayed—I didn't leave until the half past four train!"

Chief Kelly almost bounded from his chair at this admission, but Smith remained perfectly quiet. A smile played around his lips.

"That's right—I want the truth. Where were you most of the time?"

"I was in the garage. I slept for a time and then began to pack my things."

"Did you see any one else around the garage while you were there?"

"Yes. Some time after four o'clock some one came out of the house and passed through the garage and went out of the door leading to the river bank. I was sleeping at the time, but I got up and looked out and saw him walking along the gravelled path."

"Did you get a look at his face?"

"I did not. All I know is that he wore a gray overcoat and that he seemed very much agitated."

"Would you know the overcoat if you happened to see it again?"

"I think I would."

"That's all," exclaimed the detective, with a note of victory in his voice. "I think we have every link in the chain completed. Kelly, if you will call all the household together in the drawing-room we will present them with the results of our investigation."

It was an expectant group that gathered a few minutes later. Mrs. Harkins, the housekeeper, aggressively dominated the scene, and beside her stood Miss Allen, still grieving and half frightened at the dramatic aspect of the meeting. Percival Jayne occupied the fringe of the little tableau, and just behind him were Ambrose Berrello, the butler, and Jim Moody, the chauffeur.

The darkness of the rooms was only partially relieved by a few candles in brackets on the sides of the walls. It was picturesque, but under the circumstances it gave most of the actors a creepy feeling. Peabody Smith appeared with something of the air of a conjurer about to take a rabbit

lost a hat. But before the exhibition opened the detective did a strange thing. He turned to Kelly and whispered to him in a stage voice that could be distinctly heard by every one.

"Chief," he said, "after a while I wish you would go up to the second story front room and bring me down a seal ring that I left on the bureau."

As he said these words he melted into the darkness, and, unobserved, gained a back stairway and almost ran into the bedroom. He slipped into a half-opened closet and watched. He did not have long to wait. Presently the door opened, and a man crept into the room, walking on tiptoe. He moved over to the bureau and began nervously pawing the articles that stood there.

Evidently he did not find what he wanted, because he turned to the drawers of the mahogany stand and opened them one after another. All of this did not take more than a minute, and when he left the room the bowed head and sagging shoulders spelled disappointment as plainly as though he had shouted it at the top of his voice.

Peabody Smith managed to get back to the drawing-room before the mysterious one had resumed his place in the circle. Clearing his throat, he said:

"I'm going to try and reproduce the scene that took place here yesterday afternoon, and I'll do it as briefly as possible. At four o'clock Samuel Hodge was alone in his little office, going over some papers preparatory to meeting Percival Jayne, to whom he was to turn over his business, as most of you know.

"Mrs. Harkins and Miss Allen were out; Ambrose Berrello was taking his afternoon siesta in his room in the attic; and Jim Moody was asleep in the garage. Now, most of you are acquainted with many of the details of this story, and if I make any errors I want to be corrected.

About fifteen minutes after four some one rang the doorbell, and Hodge answered. The caller had business with him, and was escorted into the little office. There was a dispute between them, a struggle, and the visitor struck Samuel Hodge a vio-

lent blow on the temple—a blow that killed him. It was not premeditated, but it was a murder, just the same. Terrified by the tragedy, he did not know what to do at first.

"But he recovered quickly, and then came the instinct of self-preservation, and he began to cover up his tracks. His first move was to add to the disorder of the room. He would make it appear as though a burglar had entered and killed Hodge for his money.

"To give color to this, he abstracted four hundred dollars in bank notes from the drawer of the desk, but he made the error of permitting the diamond stickpin and the watch and chain to remain on the body of his victim.

"He pulled down the lid of the desk, and then, most realistic move of all, he smashed the pane of glass of the door leading into the room from the garden. That might have been enough for any ordinary person, but this murderer was no ordinary person. He had the dramatic instinct in a high degree.

"It was necessary for him to leave the house. He noticed a pair of rubbers on the floor. Why not depart by the back door, as a burglar would, and, at the same time, leave a series of footprints on the snow-covered ground to confuse astute investigators?

"He did this, and he walked through the garage without, as he thought, disturbing Moody, who was asleep in the loft. He threw the rubbers into the river, then glided away by the graveled path, which failed to photograph his real footprints."

Percival Jayne, who had listened to this recital with distended eyes and white face, gave a nervous laugh. "That is a very interesting story, but—but you haven't got your man."

"Oh, yes, I have!" retorted Peabody Smith, with a confident toss of his head. "He's in this room at this minute!"

"And his name—"

"His name," exclaimed the detective, pointing a long finger directly at the speaker, "is Percival Jayne!"

The look on the man's face was terrifying. Everybody in the room instinctively

drew away from him as though he were some loathsome thing.

He laughed shrilly. "You're—you're a poor humorist, Smith," he mumbled. "It has been distinctly proven that I reached the house after the murder and was admitted by the butler."

"Yes," admitted the detective, "and you came to the front door by way of the gravelled path—the path that you thought would tell no tales."

"But the motive!" shouted Jayne. "What motive could I have had for such a thing? I was to get the business, and the paper you found on the desk transferred it to me."

Smith nodded thoughtfully.

"A point well taken, but it can be explained quickly. Hodge found that you had been systematically robbing the firm. The discovery changed all of his plans. He told you he was going to destroy the transfer papers and have you arrested besides. You struggled with him to get possession of the paper. Two fragments of the document were torn off. Then you struck him on the temple with your seal ring, and he fell dead."

"How can you prove that fantastic story?"

"I have here two pieces of parchment paper that I found on the floor. They exactly fit the document which you afterward laid inside the desk for me to discover later."

Jayne's face was horribly distorted, and the cold sweat stood out on his brow. "Even if this wild story is true, it does not make me the man."

The detective turned to the chauffeur, who had been listening with wide-open eyes.

"Moody, you remember that coat. Do you see anything like it in this room?"

"Yes," was the instant reply. "The coat that Mr. Jayne is wearing is the one that I saw on the man yesterday afternoon!"

Jayne made one last attempt to wriggle out of the net of facts which was slowly but surely enmeshing him.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said haltingly, "we—we must use reason. Is it rea-

sonable that I should bring this man down here if I had been guilty of this crime? I—I ask you, is it reasonable?"

Before any one could answer, Peabody Smith made reply:

"That was your fatal blunder, and you owe it to your own vanity. You thought you had established a perfect alibi. You are not the first crook who has made that mistake. You felt that it would put the finishing touch on your work if you would boldly come to me and ask me to find the murderer. That, you imagined, would be the final step in utterly throwing suspicion from you."

"It's a lie!" shouted the distracted man. "It's all a lie! I didn't do it! I tell you I didn't do it!"

The detective stared at him out of his remorseless steel-gray eyes.

"If you were innocent," demanded Smith, "why did you run upstairs when I told Kelly to get the seal ring on the bureau?"

"But there was no ring on the bureau." "Certainly not. That was all a bluff to clinch my case. I knew the guilty man would attempt to recover possession of that bit of evidence. It was the weapon—if we may call a ring a weapon—with which the crime was committed."

"I hid the ring," unconsciously confessed the culprit, "and I could not find it."

"You're telling the truth at last," triumphantly exclaimed the detective. "You knew that the wound on Hodge's temple would correspond exactly with the seal on your ring. And you hid it! But there was something else that you couldn't hide."

"What—what was that?" shivered Percival Jayne.

Smith grasped his trembling hand. He pointed to the third finger.

"It was that bluish mark around your finger where the ring had been worn. It's as plain as the nose on your face. It made the ring conspicuous by its absence. And you couldn't hide that scratch on the back of your hand you made when you smashed the pane of glass."

It was after Jayne had collapsed and confessed that Chief Kelly asked Peabody Smith how he got his first clew.

"It was the broken pane of glass," said Peabody. "The whole drama was well staged. Everything pointed to burglary until I examined that broken glass, and then, like a flash, I realized that it was an inside job.

"The fragments of the glass were all on

the lawn, and not in the room. That was proof positive that the pane of glass had been smashed by some one in the office. It was the one false move in the building of the perfect alibi—but it is that trifle that will send Percival Jayne to the electric chair."

Next Week: "THE ROBINSON RUBIES."



IMMORTAL FRAUDS CAREER OF A MIRACULOUS MANUSCRIPT MONGER

By CAPTAIN HORATIO WRAGGE

NO goldsmith in the fifteenth century seemed quite so enterprising or so rich as a certain Herr Fust. He was always inquiring into the merits of any new thing that came along and investing his money in it. His home was in the German city of Mentz but about the year 1453 he turned up in the city of Paris and sought an interview with the king.

Fust's object, as explained by himself, was to exhibit a copy of the Latin Bible, beautifully engrossed by an amanuensis of rare skill. The initial letter of each chapter heading was done in red with ornamentation of perfect taste and yet intricate.

Having impressed the clergy with the importance of his manuscript, Fust succeeded at last in gaining an audience of the king, whose eye was sufficiently trained to detect the beauty of this Bible. The usual price of such a treasure was fifteen hundred crowns, but in view of his esteem for his majesty, the goldsmith offered to sell it for only seven hundred crowns. The king closed at once with so eligible an offer. The money was paid to Fust, who set out on his return to Mentz.

How the Manuscript Monger Hoaxed the King.

On the following morning the archbishop arrived in some haste at the palace. He wanted to show the king a Latin Bible he had bought only the day before. It was beautifully done in what seemed the usual fashion of the monkish scribes, except that the initials, worked in red, revealed perfect artistry and infinite pains. The king looked in wonder at the archbishop's treasure.

"But I have one," said his majesty, "just like it."

This the archbishop could not believe, whereupon the king had Fust's Bible brought into his study. The archbishop was dumfounded when he examined the work. It was in all respects an exact duplicate of the one he had brought himself for the king's inspection. The monarch and the prelate spent some half an hour in comparing the pair of books. They were alike not only in every turn and angle of each letter but also in the marks of punctuation. The archbishop explained that he had paid some five hundred crowns for the Bible, a price much below that which prevailed in those days for a copy of the book of books.

"Who sold this to you?" asked the king. "I got mine from a goldsmith named Fust who hails from Mentz."

"The very man who sold me my copy!" cried the prelate. "What can this mean?"

The king and the archbishop exhausted every conjecture for a considerable time. The art of printing being unknown to either of them, and the books, upon further inspection, proving exact duplicates in every page, the only possible explanation of the mystery must be that Fust was a wizard.

Accused of Spilling Human Blood.

The theory seemed so plausible that the king felt convinced on another point. The red initial letters must have been done in human blood. This implied that Fust had been involved in the murder of various children whose sanguinary deaths were agitating the city just then. The only thing to do was to get hold of this man Fust. He had left Paris, but he had not taken the slightest precaution to conceal his identity or his movements and in a few days he was captured within a few miles of the frontier.

In the meantime other copies of this Bible began to turn up. Comparison showed that they were all alike, even to the position of certain letters at the end of a line. The proof of wizardry was thus overwhelming.

Fust, when thrown into a cell, denied emphatically that any magic was at the bottom of the wizardry. He insisted that he was not concerned in the death of anybody and that the red was

good and real ink. His protestations were in vain. Brought back to Paris, he was duly charged with being a wizard, and the book was shown to the "men of the robe," who passed judgment upon offenders of this sort. His offense was all the more heinous because his black magic had been employed upon the word of God.

There was every prospect that Fust would be consigned to the flames when he announced that he would make a full confession. A notary was summoned to his cell. He was sworn in the presence of various witnesses. The Bible, he said, had been "imprinted" by movable "types," as he called them, and these types had been cut out of small pieces of metal, a letter to each piece of metal. After they were correctly set, the metal types received a smearing of ink and the face of the types was pressed against a sheet of manuscript paper by means of a contrivance worked with a screw.

At first the court officials were inclined to think the man from Mentz was practicing some new deception. Investigation revealed that this Fust had met a man named Gutenberg in Mentz. This Gutenberg arrived in town with the secret of a mysterious art he had already practised in Strasburg. The evidence showed that Gutenberg could "take the pages from the presses and by removing two screws, thoroughly separate them—the letters—from one another, so that no man may know what it is." This seemed to the king, when duly reported to his majesty, as black a kind of magic as anything yet charged against Fust, but the archbishop, being an enlightened man and a friend of learning, was greatly impressed by the importance of the new art.

"But why," asked the king, "did the man pretend that he had a beautiful manuscript worked by a scribe such as never lived yet?"

"Ah, sire," said the archbishop, "this fellow has been tricky so long that he cannot go straight though God's book be in his hand."

Fust was accordingly permitted to go back to Mentz where he devoted himself to the art of printing, promising a rich reward to any of his workmen who would invent an important improvement. This spurred the zeal of a youth named Peter Schoeffer, who devised a matrix by means of which type could be cast instead of being cut laboriously. Fust absorbed his employee's idea greedily, and when the youth asked for the rich reward, the goldsmith said: "You shall marry my daughter." The youth was by no means delighted at the prospect, but he had to be satisfied and the wedding bells were soon heard all over the town. For the rest of his life Fust boasted that he had got rid of his daughter on the most advantageous terms and his wife would exclaim in vexation at his notorious avarice and hard bargains: "This printing is certainly the devil's own art!"

TO EVERY MOOD

SOMETIMES the heath's amidst,

And veiled, wraith-visions spell

The hidden lake. Sometimes

The stars retire, and in the night

The muffled drums of fear

Burden our hearts.

These are the interludes

When faith conspires with

Memoried yesterdays, and hope,

In clarion call—

Beckons the dawn.

Ofttimes the heath's aglow,

And patterned with a scroll of living flowers.

The teasing fingers of the wind

Stir the lake to rippling laughter, and

The fifes of happiness blow sweetly low

'Midst the reeds of the marsh.

These are the interludes

When hearts afire

Garner God's mirth.

These are the interludes,

Guardian of the morrow.

Leslie Ramón.



Crafty Rogues

By BOICE DU BOIS

CHAPTER IX.

THE HOLE IN THE WALL.

"MEET me here an hour from now," was Bruce's parting word of instruction to Bailey as he took the unlighted lantern and tucked it under his arm.

Upon reaching the alley he paused to assure himself that he was unobserved. Toward the river he saw the slouching figure of a late pedestrian, who emerged for the moment in a flood of light at the next crossing. This and the muffled crack of a patrolman's night stick against the flagstones, over in the swamp, were the only evidences of life, or movement.

The first thing he did was to traverse the length of the alley for the purpose of learning whether there was a door at the other end.

Carefully feeling his way in the darkness he found that there was one. It opened into a small court, and as it was no part of his program to attract undue attention from the rear, he closed it.

A moment later the blackness melted as a flood of light from his lantern touched the grim walls around him. One quick glance was sufficient. Bruce knew that he had discovered another trick entrance to the former gambling house.

It was far from being secretive—just a plain, shallow doorway that had been cut into the wall on the Cracker Pot side. In fact, Bruce found it disappointing. At the same time he could understand how valuable an exit of this kind must have been to the nimble-fingered gentry who devised it, offering, as it did, two avenues of escape; one direct to the street, and the other by way of the rear tenements.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 4.

With mind alert to any one of a dozen possibilities, or disappointments, Bruce tried the door.

It opened without any effort, swung out into the alley, clean and free.

"A bit of luck," he chuckled, pleased at the thought of gaining an entrance without detection by some chance prowler of the night, who might make use of the alley, in order to reach his apartments.

The sweep of the door was the full width of the narrow alley and the act of opening it compelled Bruce to step back. Hence—his surprise—upon moving forward and directing the light of his lantern into the supposed opening, to find his way blocked by a solid wall. It was a wall of lathe and plaster, as if some one had pushed the side of a room to within a foot of the door.

As he stood, glaring at the unexpected obstruction, his eye was attracted by a carefully rolled object that lay in the small opening at the foot of the wall.

It was a white coat, such as bartenders wear.

Instantly Bruce appreciated the significance of his find. The coat belonged to Emile. Connors's bartender had made his escape during the *mêlée* by way of this secret exit. In a hazy sort of way, Bruce remembered having seen the twinkle of a white coat at the rear of the dance hall following the arrival of the juggling sailor and his motley crew. He had speculated, more or less, as to what happened to Emile after the police forced their way into the Cracker Pot, but this was the first evidence of his escape.

The white coat would have made him too conspicuous by far, and once having gained the seclusion of the alley, he undoubtedly hastened to discard it.

Repressing a desire to search the pockets for any telltale bit of evidence that would prove to be of value in helping to solve the Cracker Pot mystery, Bruce placed the coat on his arm and renewed his mind to the task at hand.

Stepping back a few feet toward the street Bruce made a mental calculation as to the distance of the opening from the front of the building.

His conclusion was that the door was

directly behind the refrigerator in Connors's back room.

Then, like a flash, it dawned upon him that the obstructing wall was the back of the refrigerator. It had been lathed and plastered; all of which, to any one who might have chanced upon it, would convey the impression that it was an abandoned entrance.

Bruce, however, was not to be diverted by the mere looks of things. He placed his shoulder against the wall.

It moved!

He gave an exclamation of delight, and as if waiting for the magic word, it gave way, opening like a hinged door.

A second later he was in Connors's back room.

Even as he turned to inspect the clever device the big refrigerator—for such it was—noiselessly swung back and completely closed the doorway.

As Bruce gazed in silent admiration at the cleverness with which the heavy refrigerator had been employed to divert attention from the door that led into the alley, it dawned upon him that Connors's disappearance was now explained.

Now he understood why it had all been so baffling to Bailey and himself that first night.

Standing in the alley, with the door open, and the refrigerator pushed aside, it had been a very simple matter for the ruffians to overpower Connors as he lifted his arm to light the gas. Bruce also now understood why they had failed to find any trace of their mode of entry. Then again the speed with which they had spirited their captive to the waiting carriage was no longer a mystery.

Distressing as the night ordeal had been, Bruce was conscious of an exhilaration of spirit. The stimulus of success was surging within him. Why not follow his pledge of loyalty to the end? Was he under less obligation to Connors now than when he acknowledged the man's right to call upon him for assistance?

There were other reasons why he should exert one last effort. Connors alone could unravel the snarl of dark motives that swirled about the Cracker Pot, and Bruce

the very moment that tremendous interest was aroused.

Then, of a sudden, he had tossed him into a position of complete disorder. Not a word was said, and behind it all loomed the shadow of something big. He had been to the gage of battle. He had stretched his muscles, under the joy of physical conflict, and the primitive man within him called for more.

That a ferocious enigma had been enmeshed within the tangled skein of mystery. Saint or siren—he knew not which, in fact, at the moment cared not. Just now he was satisfied to believe that it was the psychology of the thing that lured him on.

It is ever thus that men delude themselves, for with grim visage and menacing brow Bruce told himself that Connors must be found.

Fate, who knows a thing or two, chuckled and echoed the name "Connors" with a rising inflection, accompanied by a sardonic grin.

Conscience likewise returned to speak a few kind words: "And how about Joie the Jugg?"

How strange! Bruce had almost forgotten him—and it was for this he had forced an entrance.

Picking his way through the jumble of broken fixtures that littered the dance hall, Bruce made his way to the platform.

One look was sufficient to proclaim the fact that the door leading to the stone chamber was out in the same position as when he had left it.

Some one had climbed up through the opening, or down into the room below.

Dimly he saw his light, so that it would be possible to scan the interior of the chamber. He was not there.

The discovery occasioned no surprise. On the contrary—he experienced a feeling of relief. Whatever might develop in the future, his present obligation had been discharged.

He stepped through the dance hall to the bar.

Looking at the wreck and carnage here and there on the dance hall; an impression of broken furniture

and fixtures. Even the ancient bar had been torn from its fastenings.

Gazing at the prosaic symbol of Emile's strenuous profession, Bruce suddenly remembered that the bartender's coat hung over his arm.

Instinctively, he went through the pockets.

They were empty, except for a bit of printed cardboard.

Holding it nearer the light Bruce saw that it was a ferry ticket—one that had been issued by the Hoboken Ferry Company.

The next moment Bruce was all attention.

"Pass one vehicle," was the line that arrested his attention.

What had Emile to do with the passing of one vehicle over the Hoboken ferry?

Then came the question: "Would an ordinary carriage be classified as a vehicle?"

If so, had Emile purchased this ticket for the purpose of passing the carriage in which Connors had been kidnaped, over the Hoboken ferry?

It was quite true that all this was discounted by the fact that the ticket had not been used, but this did not detract from the major discovery that a ticket of this kind had been in Emile's possession. Emile was no hack driver.

Having made the discovery that Emile was aware of the secret passage, and had recently made use of it—that very night—why not assume that he had been a factor in the arrangement of those details which provided for the quick removal of Connors, once he was out of the Cracker Pot?

Bruce gave his fixed attention to the bit of printed pasteboard. There was a number on it.

B457-472.

His blood quickened as he considered the possible value of his discovery.

Suppose the ferry company could tell him what day and hour that ticket had been sold? What if it proved to be Saturday night—the night on which Connors had been kidnaped?

A counter thought flashed. Hundreds of vehicles must have crossed that ferry on the night in question.

This is true, was balanced by two facts.

either one of which might have a strong bearing on the problem.

The first had to do with the weather conditions that night. On account of the fog, fewer vehicles would have crossed—the night having been one of almost impenetrable blackness.

The second important fact, not to be overlooked, was that the carriage would have reached the ferry about three thirty in the morning, an hour at which fewer public conveyances are in evidence.

With the firm conviction that a discovery had been made which would ultimately prove to be worthy of his best effort, Bruce now sought the street.

Looking at his watch he found that his appointment with Bailey was a full half hour overdue.

It was five o'clock in the morning, and the granite towers of the Brooklyn Bridge were blocking their huge bulk against the pink tints of an eastern sky.

The big city was just thrusting its feet out of bed and legions of work-a-day citizens would soon be on the march.

All of which argued that while it was one thing to travel about at night with a giant negress stowed away in a public coach, it was quite another affair to continue the parade in broad daylight.

It likewise began to dawn on Bruce that his fat woman was fast becoming a "white elephant."

Nearing the section of the block where he had requested Bailey to meet him, Bruce saw that the carriage was drawn up to the curb, and some one was blanketing the horses.

To his surprise, upon closer approach, he found that it was Bailey.

"It is both creditable and humane of you to show so much solicitude for another man's property," was Bruce's comment as he came up behind Bailey; "but where is the owner of this outfit?"

There was a note of fatalism in Bailey's voice as he turned to reply to the question.

"Right here," he answered, tapping himself on the chest. "I'm the owner."

"You!" gasped Bruce. "You—the owner?"

"That's what I said."

"I don't understand."

"You will, all-right, when I explain."

Then as if the process of explanation required special emphasis Bailey hitched up one shoulder, pushed back his hat, and extended his right hand, as a convenient base, upon which to thump his left.

"I had to buy this whole blooming outfit," he proclaimed.

"Had to buy it?" questioned Bruce.

"Yes, sir—had to put up two hundred and seventy-five dollars, or take to the sidewalk with our fat lady friend."

"I don't grasp it—what happened?"

"Everything happened. First of all, the hackman got nervous prostration. It was this way: after you left us he began to circle the block, and had made something like seven times around the arena, when a wise patrolman stepped out from a dark doorway and asked: 'What's the idea? Runnin' a merry-go-round, or suthin' like that?' That settled our lease and tenure on Doyle's licensed hack. 'Take her out,' he bawled, just as soon as we made the next corner. 'Wha' d' you think I'm running—a rest cure?' Say, Bruce, I had an awful time. He threatened to drive to the nearest police station and have me arrested. It ended by my purchasing the full equipment."

"Splendid," exclaimed Bruce. "Now we can work out our plans without interference."

"Whose plans?" asked Bailey.

"Ours—I have made a discovery that I think will help to clean up the entire mystery."

"Well, if it is not going to distress you too much, do you mind telling me where I blend in on these plans of ours?"

"Certainly—for the next three or four hours you are going to do the ferries. You are going to ride over to Jersey City—then turn around and ride back. After that you repeat."

With arms folded and legs widely thrust apart, Bailey stared at Bruce.

"Me?" he questioned. "I'm going to do all this?"

"Certainly."

"Of course being a clergyman, Bruce, you don't know a thing about a certain celluloid dog that chased an asbestos cat,

you have got as much chance to get me to do this as that dog had to catch that rat. Bruce, I wouldn't be left alone half hour with this outfit and money inside of it for all the money in the world."

Bailey had reached over and taken Bruce by his lapels.

"I'm not going to get any credit for it, Bruce, but from now on I'm your little Ruth and Naomi. Where you go—I go. And here's another thing. As long as I have made an investment of two seventy-five in this thing, why not call a meeting of the board of directors? It's going to relieve my mind a whole lot to find out what's back of this joy-riding on the ferryboats for the next few hours."

"It's simple enough. We have got to keep moving. There isn't a place in New York where we would dare to take this negress. For safety's sake, you bought this antiquated outfit and for the same reason we have got to keep on the move with it. Now, my idea is this: if you work the ferries it will be easy for the horses and lessen your chances of being held up by some inquisitive policeman. In the meantime I will probably have acquired the information I am after. It is five thirty now. Give me until noon. At that hour I will meet you any place you say."

"Get it right, Bruce; get it right! You won't have to meet me—I'll be with you. Every time the clock strikes, between this and noon, I'll be right where you can take me by the hand, I will."

Bailey's persistency annoyed Bruce. He would think of but one argument. It was a weak one, at that, and he knew it.

"Suppose she wakes up," he spluttered, "what then?"

"She isn't going to wake up—don't worry about that."

As if to confirm his statement Bailey opened the door of the coach.

"Listen to the beautiful sawmill," he chuckled with a grin.

"It is vulgarly primitive to say the least, but tell me—in addition to her snoring—is the noise I hear?"

"That," said Bailey, "is the vibration of the roof of the coach. You

know—in harmony with the lady's respiratory organs."

"I'll admit that the lady slumbers," said Bruce, "but why so much assurance that she will continue to do so?"

"Because I know. You don't suppose that I would go frolicking with chance on anything so serious as the possibilities of her waking up, do you? No, sir—I know whereof I speak. Here—look at these."

He held out a small phial to Bruce, who took it and read the label, "Sleeping tablets—sugar-coated—one every hour."

"What are you going to do?" asked Bruce. "Wake her up every hour, so she can take one?"

"I should say not. I got her loaded with enough of them to last for eight hours."

"I hope it will be all right," said Bruce rather doubtfully. "At any rate, it is time we moved."

"Just a minute, Bruce. I want to ask a question. Am I a regular member of the board of directors, or just a plain dummy?"

"You are regular," replied Bruce with a laugh.

"All right—then the board asks for some information about this recent discovery that you have made and what you intend to do."

Thereupon Bruce related all that had been disclosed by his visit to the Cracker Pot.

It was quite evident that Bailey was not impressed by Bruce's report.

"Well—what do you think of it?" Bruce finally asked.

"Inasmuch as we have been friends for so many years, I'd rather be excused from telling you the truth," was Bailey's response.

"Don't let a little thing like friendship embarrass you," said Bruce.

"Oh, very well, in that case I want to say that of all the hair-brained, loose-constructed, wind-flapping ideas this is the worst."

"Then you will not stand by—and see it through?" questioned Bruce.

"Certainly I will! You need a guardian and I am going to stick. Where do you want me to go?"

"The Hoboken ferry," replied Bruce, climbing to Bailey's side.

"Hoboken ferry," repeated Bailey as he pulled the decrepit steeds about face for the ferry in question.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE FOOT OF KING'S BLUFF.

THE Hoboken ferry was at the foot of Barclay Street; distant about a half mile, and upon their arrival, Bruce sought the gateman's booth, which occupied the customary "isle of safety" just inside the gates.

The door was opened by a pipe-smoking nautical of phlegmatic mien. As he braced his pea-jacketed shoulder against the door post his attitude was "Ship ahoy!"

"Can you tell me on what date your company sold this ticket?" asked Bruce, producing the bit of pasteboard found in Emile's pocket.

The stolid gateman consulted a book on his desk.

"Last Saturday."

"Which side of the river—Hoboken or New York?"

"New York—this office."

"At what hour?"

"Couldn't tell you—probably in the afternoon."

"Where can I find the man who was on duty at this gate Saturday night?"

"You are talking to him."

"Do you recall the weather that night?"

"Do you mean the fog?"

"Yes."

For answer the gateman nodded in the affirmative.

"Was the travel very heavy?" continued Bruce.

"No—we only ran one boat after twelve o'clock."

"What was the name of that boat?"

"The James Rumsey. She's in the slip now."

"Are the same deckhands aboard now that were on duty Saturday night?"

"Same crew. What is it you want to know?"

"Information about a carriage that may have crossed early Sunday morning."

"You ought to be able to get it, We

only made two trips between one and five in the morning. Better move lively if you want to board her. She lays up this trip over, and the captain will signal for closed gates in a minute. Ask for Johnny Darington."

There was no time to return to the street and hold a consultation with Bailey over the advisability of his remaining on the New York side until Bruce returned, and it was a question whether he would consent to any such arrangements, therefore Bruce signaled him to drive in.

Once aboard he lost no time in looking up the deckhand who answered to the name of Darington, a middle-aged, salty-looking sea dog, even though his foreign voyages were confined to the Hoboken port.

"Were you on this boat when she made her runs last Sunday morning?"

"Not runs, mister—we bumped our way across. Visiting—that's what we were doing early Sunday morning. We hit everything afloat, and made social calls at every pier on the river. Suffering mackerel—what a night!"

"I understand that you only made two trips after one o'clock. Is that correct?"

"Right, mister—and those were about six too many."

"If a carriage crossed at that hour of the morning would you be apt to remember it?"

"Not if things went in their regular way—we carry too many of them, but on Sunday morning, yes. There was one on the last trip, and Shad Roe Martin drove it."

"Do you know him?"

"So to speak, yes. Everybody does over in Hudson County."

"On that last trip of ours he had four life preservers on—all at the same time, and whenever the old Rumsey kissed the end of a pier, he was ready to jump into the river."

"Do you know who was with him?"

For the first time the deckhand became suspicious.

"Say, mister—what are you—a detective?"

"No, I am just an ordinary citizen in search of a gang of scoundrels, and any legitimate information you can give me is going to be of great service."

seconds to eight. Shad Roe would be in any other company. You have got about all I can give you in the way of information. That carriage was bunched with the usual run of milk trucks and express wagons that go to Hoboken every morning, and they sure kept to themselves, even with all the excitement. But one thing I'll gamble on. Whoever his pals were—they came from the morgue."

"From the morgue?" questioned Bruce, in surprise.

"Yes—that's a section of the river front on the Jersey shore opposite Thirty Fourth Street—a regular nest of dock rats and river pirates. Shad Roe just naturally fits in with them, on account of his business."

"What is his occupation?" asked Bruce.

"Shad fishing. His nets are generally set in the river just above Christopher Street. That's where he gets his name."

"This place you call the morgue—how can I reach it?"

"By going north through Hoboken—then you cross the Elysian Fields, and continue on the Bull's Ferry Road."

A few minor directions followed before the boat reached its slip on the New Jersey side of the Hudson, and about an hour later Bruce and Bailey reached the section to which they had been directed.

The Bull's Ferry Road on which they were driving was lifting to make its way upward and northward through a natural ravine to the top of the Palisades. To continue in that direction would take them away from the river. To their right was a narrow lane, which evidently led to the water front. It likewise seemed to be the only way of reaching the foot of that rocky rock-bound cliff, known as "King's Bluff"—a bold, defiant crag, which marks the last stand of the Palisades to the south.

As the deckhand's final instructions had been to locate this striking landmark as a means of reaching the morgue, Bruce now directed Bailey to drive into the lane.

A clump of trees about one hundred yards beyond the main road offered a convenient stopping place, and here they halted.

"Now what?" questioned Bailey.

"You've got to guess," was Bruce's reply.

"You want me to remain here until you reconnoiter?"

"Yes."

Before answering Bailey carefully opened the door of the carriage and peeped in.

"Liable to wake up any minute," he said.

"How do you know?"

"Low pressure. No more pep. Last time I listened, just before driving on the ferry, she was going strong enough to cut a California redwood."

"I do not see how anything human could negotiate a more violent sequence of snores than she is delivering just now," replied Bruce.

"That's because you have no ear for machinery. She's running down, I tell you. The slat in the roof has stopped vibrating."

"Don't you think she is good for another hour?"

"Possibly."

"Will you chance it?"

A good-natured grin of concession was spreading over Bailey's face.

"Just because you ask it, I'll say 'yes,' but, honest, Bruce, for butterfly chasing, this trip is the worst I ever knew. Connors was kidnaped in a carriage, and a carriage crossed over a ferry, and—Heavens, man, it's a rainbow!"

Bruce was visibly impressed by the bantering criticism of his friend. He wavered.

"Very well, I'll bargain with you," saying which he took out his watch. "If I do not return in one hour's time with some evidence of the fact that we are working in the right direction we will go back to New York and turn the negress over to Captain Wallers. Then we will sell the outfit, square accounts, and go home."

"Giddap," chirped Bailey as he picked up the reins in an attempt to galvanize the weary old steeds into a semblance of action.

"Hold on—what are you going to do?"

"Turn 'em around so we will be all ready to say those few sad words of 'fare-thee-well' to Hoboken."

Five minutes later Bruce rounded the foot of King's Bluff and started north over that historic strip of Weehawken shore line, which witnessed the tragic death of Alexander Hamilton; the Palisades on one side—the placid Hudson on the other.

With all—the woods; tall timber clinging to the scanty soil amid the bowlders; standing almost as they did when the crack of Aaron Burr's pistol echoed among the cliffs.

To the right, facing New York, was the shallow cove, which Bruce knew was the morgue; the grave of many a superannuated canal boat; Mary Janes and Alice Anns that had drawn their last watery breath in the valley of the Hudson.

Here and there an ancient keel, with splintered ribs, lifted from the black mud and a short distance from the shore were several of the more sturdy wrecks, some of which had retained their superstructure, even though their backs were bent.

Among them was an ice barge with a tell-tale sag amidship. In deck space it might have served as a good-sized dance hall, except for the disadvantage of hill-climbing, which would have had to accompany a waltz, fore or aft.

Bruce scrutinized this more habitable old craft carefully. Some one had made it snug—evidently a landsman, as two windows facing the shore proclaimed workmanship other than that of a ship's carpenter.

A short length of stove pipe, projecting through the one story roof, gave convincing proof of a tenant, or tenants, and from this makeshift chimney a drift of smoke was lifting.

A jumpy sort of footpath made its crooked way to what was either the bow, or the front stoop of this mud-anchored craft. It was a rickety bridge of stray ship's timber that touched here and there a half-submerged deck, or sunken spar, as if anxious to avoid a ducking.

Out in the channel, beyond the shallow confines of the canal boat morgue, Bruce saw a nondescript collection of shipping: a whale back, several coal barges, and a tramp steamer.

East and north of these was a battle cruiser riding at anchor, and it passed through his mind that this was some visiting war craft from foreign waters. Of one thing he was certain—it was not a United States vessel.

Taking note of the general scene before him, Bruce realized how little it had to do

with the object of his visit and an overwhelming sense of defeat settled upon him.

His hour had expired, or nearly so. Of what good was ten minutes? That was all he had to his credit before going back to keep his word with Bailey.

Retracing the shore path, his attention was drawn to a small boat which was rounding the stern of the tramp steamer.

It was making for the shore, and Bruce decided to wait.

A few minutes later he saw that there were two men at the oars.

There was a grassy knoll just behind him, and Bruce seated himself there to watch the approaching boat.

Upon second thought he decided to secrete himself behind a near-by clump of bushes.

As the small boat nosed the beach he saw that the men were foreigners. Both were dark-skinned, and from the ears of one he caught the glint of brass, or gold.

"Earrings," he mused.

Bruce likewise noted the ease with which they handled their boat. It was not the work of landlubbers. These men were of the sea.

The next moment Bruce had the surprise of his life, for these seamen carefully lifted from the bottom of their boat the strange-looking chest that Eddie Carbon had risked so much to save when he climbed back into the stone chamber from the underground passage beneath the Cracker Pot!

Then Bruce saw one of the sailors lift the chest to his shoulder and carefully pick his way over the footpath to the ice barge. Then he disappeared within.

"Where did these men come from?" was the question now in Bruce's mind.

As if to answer his own question he looked toward the tramp steamer—the place where they first came into view as they rounded the stern of the vessel.

For a second he was confused. The grouping of the ships out in the channel were not the same as before.

Then it dawned upon him. The tramp steamer was moving upstream. He wondered if these men had been dropped from her deck before weighing anchor.

Another hasty glance, and Bruce gasped

in surprise. He began to understand. The steamer—in the position he had first seen it—had completely hidden a rakish-looking schooner that lay at anchor just beyond it.

His blood quickened at the thought which followed.

"Was this Captain Jake's schooner?"

No—that could hardly be possible, as the captain was supposed to have laid his course for Boston.

Wait—his vision was becoming clearer, his mind quicker. It was Emile who had informed Connors that Captain Jake had gone to Boston—Emile who had been instrumental in making way with Connors!

He saw it all now. The conspiracy from the first had been to get Connors out of the way. To have him leave the Cracker Pot on one pretext or another. When the Boston lure failed they deliberately kidnapped him.

But why?

Bruce strained at the question. Then he thought that he had found the answer.

The scheme—in part—had been to remove Connors so that the sailors might be free to raid the Cracker Pot during his absence.

But the motive for this—what was it?

The answer to this question also came. The motive was to secure the negress.

A moment later Bruce gave up the problem as he saw the fallacy of his reasoning; saw the absurdity of concluding that Captain Jake would bring the negress from the Congo—secrete her in the Cracker Pot, and then deliberately plan to have some one raid the place for the purpose of capturing her.

Nevertheless, a dozen facts fitted this theory, however unreasonable it might seem.

All might be made clear if this prime motive could be revealed, but just now there were things of greater importance to work on.

This black-looking schooner, out in the Hudson—did it belong to Captain Jake or some other skipper?

A final question now swept through Bruce's mind.

Had Connors been made a captive on Captain Jake's schooner? Was he moving in the right direction, after all?

Once more he checked up his evidence.

The carriage that had spirited Connors away—the chance finding of the ferry ticket—the vehicle that had been driven by Shad Roe Martin, who came from the morgue—the location of the latter—and now, the possibility of this being Captain Jake's schooner.

The very lane in which he had left Bailey seemed to add a link in the chain of evidence inasmuch as it led direct to the shore.

Having reached this narrow country road, he hurried forward, literally touching the high spots only.

A turn of the road brought the tree under which he had left Bailey into view.

Driver, coach, and horses had disappeared.

It was undignified, but Bruce ran to the spot. He thought that he might have mistaken the place. Perhaps there was another tree, just beyond.

No, there was the print of hoofs in the soft earth, the circling track of carriage wheels. He could follow them out to the main thoroughfare. There they were lost in a maize of similar imprints.

There was no room for doubt.

Bailey had disappeared.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MORGUE.

FOR an hour or more Bruce paced the dusty lane; first to the main road, then to the river.

It was an hour of fuming. Without sleep the night before his nerves had become ragged.

To assume that Bailey had deliberately abandoned him was not to be considered. Surely a combination of circumstances beyond his control were responsible. Of this he was confident. But—what were they?

To ease the grind of suspense, Bruce once more rounded King's Bluff and walked the shore.

Scanning the river he could see no indication of any change that had taken place during his absence—either in the morgue or the lay of the shipping beyond.

One thing, however, did attract his attention, and but for the fact that he was

ready to give due value to any circumstance that came under his observation it might have escaped him.

A cutter was just steaming away from the war vessel he had noticed on his first visit to the shore. In design it was decidedly foreign—the narrow smokestack suggesting a toy engine.

Out of curiosity Bruce watched the sprightly little craft as it drew away from the war vessel.

"Strange," he mused; "they are laying their course direct for that schooner."

As he watched the businesslike little cutter touched the schooner's side, a line was thrown to a waiting sailor, and some one climbed up on the deck.

"No use. I am only wasting time," said Bruce. "If I was in possession of the master key, I might make something out of it."

"How about picking the lock?" asked a voice behind him.

It was Bailey, and from the warmth of Bruce's greeting, one might have thought that they had been separated for years.

"What happened?" was his eager question.

"Arrested for not having a hack driver's license," was Bailey's answer.

"Then what?"

"Well, after that about everything happened that could be written into the calendar. You can imagine my blood pressure when that chap with the tin star on his chest climbed up on the seat and said: 'Drive to the town hall.'"

"Which, of course, you did?"

"Correct—I did, and, say, can you picture it? There was that black dame inside, ready to come to life any minute. It was just four blocks to the palace of justice, and I lost eight pounds."

"Did she wake up?"

"Wait—it's worse than that. We arrive, and in I go—right up to the floor-worn spot where they plant crime-stained humanity, and there I stood, with one eye on the carriage in front of the door, and the other one on the judge, wondering was he calloused, or just looking that way so he'd make good. Honest, Bruce, I'm cross-eyed for life."

"Go on. I'm only too anxious to know what occurred."

"Oh, it occurred all right. They have a wonderful system over here. They read it to you right out of a book. No use saying a prayer, or anything. Then all at once the wise and merciful judge says: 'Ten dollars, or ten days.'"

"Ten dollars?" questioned Bruce.

"Ten—that's the price they are asking now—and I didn't have a cent. Was flat as a prairie. Spent my last dollar when I bought the miserable outfit."

"Tough luck," was Bruce's comment.

"Not half as bad as what followed. I tell you I was dumb—couldn't even say 'Much obliged.' Just stood there, wondering how long ten days really was. Then all at once the calamity broke. That black hoodoo opened the carriage door and yelled like mad. True's I'm telling you, Bruce, I had a fever, or something that ran me up to a hundred and twenty. It took seven policemen to get her out on the sidewalk and into the station house. Ye gods! If you could have seen the judge—Jabez the merciful—all the time he's watching the crimson on my fevered brow. 'This looks suspicious—young man,' he shouts. And me standing there saying 'Yes, sir—yes, sir,' tickled silly that I had not lost my voice. Then I happened to think—suppose she commences to give this rube magistrate some of that foreign lingo?"

"You certainly were in a distressing position," said Bruce.

"Calm yourself—and wait for the climax. There I was 'yessing' his honor, thinking he might forget about the ten dollars—you know, trying to be social like—when all of a sudden, he roars: 'Who are you—and what does it all mean, anyway?' Right at that minute the fireworks all went off at once—and the heavens fell. That black beauty waddled up to the desk, takes me by the arm, and answers in good English: 'He's mah manager.'"

"You tell me that she understands English, and can speak it?" gasped Bruce.

"It's her pet vernacular—she spouts it like a fountain. Wait until you hear the rest of it. The judge looks at her, and says 'What do you mean—he's your manager?' Whereupon cutie steps forward and speaks her piece: 'I'm in vaudeville, and he's mah

manager—wha' kind of way is dis to treat a lady and a gemmen? Here we is proceed-in' on our way, calm like, when we gets stultified into cou't. Wha' for—and how come it?"

"You are fined ten dollars for not havin' a license," says the judge.

"For a minute this staggered her, then it evidently dawned upon her that I stood there with my arms folded, and had made no move to pay the fine. At any rate she produced a roll of distressingly fat proportions and said: 'I gonna pay dat little tax. I is, then we gonna drift away from here.'"

"Did she?" questioned Bruce.

"She did, but as for drifting away, that was different. 'Now you will have to take out a license,' said the judge. 'What I just paying for?' she asked. 'For not having one,' he replied. 'Now you have got to pay to get one.'

"You win, Mistah Judge. It's a double gig—I's played 'em before, but if you don't mind we gonna move de boat quick. How much dat last one goin' to nick me?"

"Ten dollars more," quoth the judge, "but the license cannot be issued until six o'clock as the town clerk works in New York and will not be home before that hour."

"Where is your friend now?" asked Bruce.

"In the station house, banqueting with the janitress, who is of her color. The restaurant next door is their base of supplies."

"Well," said Bruce, "what do you make out of it?"

"Not a thing—it's a joke."

"That is where you are wrong. This negress is playing a part, and playing it well."

"Glad to hear it, since I am her manager."

"Just consider her cleverness," continued Bruce, "when she discovered that she had been left behind by Eddie Carbon at the Tobacco Mill. She did not want to be questioned, and it would be hard to conceive of a more brilliant idea than that of misleading us by her foolish lingo."

"Come to think of it, you are right, and if she wanted to know all about our plans, what better scheme could she devise than

pretending to be asleep? I notice that she woke up at the critical time, and am beginning to think that my sleeping tablets had no effect whatever."

"Correct—she was probably wide awake and heard you say that the purchase of the hackman's outfit had left you broke. This would account for the readiness with which she paid the fines."

"One thing puzzles me," said Bailey. "I have been unable to figure out why she climbed up into the Cracker Pot during that beautiful row."

"That is something I cannot tell you, but one thing is certain, she would not have done it if Eddie Carbon had been down there with her. You will recall that Carbon had just left the Cracker Pot before the arrival of the sailors. When he returned the fight was on, and there was but one way for him to reach the negress, that was through one of the underground entrances to the stone chamber in which he had left her. He never intended that she should fall into our hands."

"That introduces something new," was Bailey's comment. "The idea of having some one else find her there has never entered my mind."

"But you will have to admit that it is reasonable. Think a minute—do you remember the bulging eyes on the juggling sailor when he first caught sight of her? Do you recall how he urged his men forward to capture her?"

"Yes."

"Well, there is your answer."

"All of which does seem to bear some evidence of truth; but tell me this: how do you account for her lying so glibly about my being her manager?"

"That is easy—first of all she wanted to get away from anything that had to do with the police; and secondly, she came mighty near the truth when she said that she was in vaudeville—at least that is my impression."

"If you expect me to follow you there, Bruce, I'll need the spot-light."

"Very well—do you remember the gorilla?"

"You mean can I forget the beast!"

"In my opinion the brute was her side

partner in the business. Her control over the animal was perfect, and evidently she could make him do anything she desired."

"But how does this square with the facts? If this negress and her gorilla formed part of Captain Jake's delivery from the Congo, how can you account for the vaudeville theory and her knowledge of English?"

"Right there," said Bruce, "you touch the big mystery. I can ask you a full dozen questions equally as perplexing. Who is the young woman that played her end of the game, with the assistance of Eddie Carbon? What was in the strange looking chest that Carbon made way with? Let me say this, Bailey. We are close to the solution of all these questions. Do you see that schooner out in the channel?"

"Yes."

"I am ready to assert that it belongs to Captain Jake."

"All right—go as far as you like. One guess is as good as another."

"Would you call it guessing if I told you that I saw two men pull away from that schooner in a small boat with Carbon's strange looking chest?"

Whereupon Bruce related the discoveries that had followed his first visit to the shore, and declared his intention of stealing out over the connecting footpath for the purpose of investigation just as soon as night would lend a hand.

"It's going to be a great night, and somehow or other the idea of working in the morgue appeals to me—they won't have far to carry us," said Bailey, with a grin.

In spite of the grimness of Bailey's joke, Bruce laughed, but quickly changed the subject. "I say," he asked, "how long is it since you have had anything to eat?"

"If I consulted my appetite I should say it was about the time I left grammar school."

Ten minutes later they were seated in the restaurant Bailey had spoken of.

When night fell they had turned into the lane and were within fifty feet of the shore when Bruce laid a warning hand on Bailey's arm. "Take it easy—I hear voices," he whispered.

With extreme caution they advanced another ten or fifteen feet, then crouching low, crept forward, inch by inch.

Standing in the center of the road were three men, their forms bulking against the luminous haze that, in spite of the night, welled up from the great city across the Hudson.

To the right was a vehicle such as hotels often employ in connection with their railroad service for the convenience of guests. It would accommodate four or more passengers.

Two of the men had evidently just returned from the river, and the rustle of their oilskins could be heard as they moved about, the rain by this time having began to operate on a business basis.

The third man walked to the head of his team and swung them closer to the bank at the side of the road.

"How'd you get along?" he asked.

"Well, we're back—ain't that enough?" was the reply of one.

"And dod-rotted mad we had to come, eh, Lopez?" growled the other.

The first one grunted an affirmative as he removed his oilskin hat to shake the water from it.

"Which one of you lads has a match?" asked his companion.

A moment later there was a flash, which alternately brightened and waned as the flame from the match dove into the bowl of his pipe or flared up within the curved hands of the smoker.

From the position occupied by Bruce it was impossible to discern the features of the man, but a glint of light had been reflected from the tip of the smoker's ear.

"The man with the earrings," was Bruce's thought. "One of the sailors who had helped to transfer Eddie Carbon's chest to the old barge."

"What did you come back for?" questioned the man standing near the horses.

"To find out how long it will take you to drive to the dock we started from—after this affair is over."

"Half an hour," was the answer.

"That's what I told 'em, but they wouldn't take my word for it. They are getting plumb scairt about the time it's going

to take. Trouble is—the whole thing was to be pulled off this afternoon, and they'd 'a' done it if we could have got alongside of that barge with a launch. Now—they're worried. You see, we got to be aboard the schooner by three. It's high tide at five, and if that excited bunch of foreigners don't get under way by that hour—the devil will be to pay."

"What are you fellows going to do—stay with me?" asked the man who was giving his attention to the horses.

"Not on your life. This is going to be the swellest show ever put over in this port. I've seen the gen-oo-ine thing down in Haiti and I know."

"And they are starting it with the finest bucket of punch ever brewed," chuckled the second man.

"Where do I come in on this?" questioned the horseman.

"You don't. You're out of it. You stick right here. Unnerstan? *Right here!*"

Saying which the man and his companion merged into the blackness as they made their way toward the river.

"Come," whispered Bruce.

With extreme caution they retraced their steps until it was safe to converse in low tones. Then Bailey was the first to speak.

"What do you make of it?"

"Very little, except that they have transferred something of considerable weight from the schooner to the barge."

"What makes you think so?"

"The fact that two men were required to carry it."

"Well, it is only an odd idea of mine, but suppose this 'something' walked?"

"I never thought of that. You may be right. The class of conveyance they made use of to reach the river would seem to confirm your deduction," was Bruce's response.

"Thanks! What comes next? We are losing time."

"I suggest that we make a circuit through the fields so as to avoid the man with the horses. It will never do for him to see us."

"A good idea—come on!"

Ten minutes later they reached the shore by sliding down a gravel bank which ran at right angles to the road.

The night was too dark to locate the exact spot at which the foot bridge leading to the barge was located, but the lighted windows were sufficient to guide them.

A dull roar of voices greeted them from across the water as one of the roystering crowd opened a door on what would have been the port side of the old craft in its days of navigation. There was something hideously primitive in both the volume and tone; a ghoulisn discord in keeping with the name of the place; shouts and curses—laughter and song. The brew of punch had evidently been passed.

Through the open door a burly figure was seen to emerge and walk toward the bow of the barge where the footpath joined it.

"He's coming ashore," whispered Bailey.

"If that is so, we must beat him to the end of the footpath."

"Where we will act in the capacity of a reception committee—yes?"

"Correct—you guessed it, and at the same time we will become our own committee of safety. If it is his intention to stand guard at the end of that path we have got to render him a negative factor, or give up the idea of finding out what is going on aboard that barge."

"I'm for the negative stuff," chuckled Bailey.

"There is a small platform at the end of the foot bridge. It is about three feet from the ground. If you take one side of it and I the other we can probably surprise him."

Under the cover of darkness they had no trouble in making it, although Bruce narrowly missed stumbling over a small boat that had been drawn up on the shore.

Crouching low—Bruce to the right, Bailey to the left—they awaited the approach of the guard.

When within a dozen feet of them he stopped for the evident purpose of adjusting a misplaced plank before venturing his weight upon it, then quickly covered the intervening distance.

His haste was undoubtedly due to a pair of unsteady legs as he immediately settled down on the upper step of the rickety stairs.

He had scarcely touched it when both men sprang upon him.

There was no opportunity for an outcry

that would warn his companions on the barge as Bailey's hand had closed over his mouth before he really knew of his danger.

At the same time Bailey had drawn him backward—his head striking the planks with a resounding thump. With equal speed Bruce had bounded to the platform and was upon him, his knees on the man's chest, his hands pinioning the burly fellow's arms to the flooring.

"Tie your handkerchief over his mouth," commanded Bruce.

"It's done," said Bailey a moment later.

"What next?"

"Look for a gun."

"I got it," was Bailey's report as he extracted one from their captive's hip pocket.

"Now, move over to the right and locate the small boat I brushed against as we made for this platform. If you do not find a coil of rope in it, cut the painter."

This being the quickest method of securing a rope's end of sufficient length to bind their man, Bailey lost no time in clipping several feet from the coiled line in the bow.

"What are we going to do with him?"

asked Bailey as the finishing knots were adjusted on the prostrate guard.

"Leave him right where he is for the present. I intend to have at least one look into this mirthful old wreck. Don't leave him for a minute while I am gone and keep his gun handy, as you may need it."

The advice was excellent as events a few seconds later proved.

Bruce had started out along the foot bridge, so that he might gain a vantage point from which to peer into the brightly lighted windows of the barge, and had taken but a few steps when there was a crash. This was followed by a splash, and the warning clang of a bell aboard the barge.

Bailey could feel his hair standing on end. In the darkness he could only imagine what had happened: that Bruce was struggling in the water under the bridge.

Once more the door on the barge opened, but this time a full dozen husky forms poured out upon the deck.

The necessity for quick thinking was urgent, and his first impulse was to leave the man he was guarding and rush to Bruce's assistance.

There was but one thing that restrained him. He had every reason to believe that Bruce had fallen into shallow water. If this was true, and he was uninjured, it would be folly to take any chance with the man he was guarding—he had been roped in complete darkness, and the cumbersome oilskins made it impossible to assume that the job was a perfect one.

To Bailey it was a moment of racking suspense.

The ruffians were gathering at the bow of the barge, and some were just about to start shoreward over the foot bridge; others were inclined to linger, as if reluctant to abandon the festive scene.

It was when the foremost man on the bridge paused and halloed to the guard, "What's wrong?" that Bailey received his inspiration.

The question had given him his cue. That something was wrong the gang on the barge knew by the clang of the warning bell, and this occurred at the moment of Bruce's fall. It was therefore reasonable to infer that the flooring of the bridge was so adjusted that Bruce's weight caused it to collapse and also operate some mechanical tug to the rope or wire that controlled the bell.

Bailey was now in full possession of both his wits and his nerve. It flashed through his mind that the guard had set his trap when he fumbled with the planking a short distance from the shore end of the bridge.

The man who was coming toward them once more bawled out his anxious: "What's wrong?"

Then Bailey awoke to action.

Pressing the muzzle of his gun to the temple of his prisoner, he quickly tore the handkerchief from his mouth.

"Tell him you fell off the bridge," he hissed, "and if you say anything else, I'll blow your brains clean across the Hudson."

CHAPTER XII.

A CLANGING BELL.

TO Bailey, who was bending over the man, it seemed an eternity before he showed any inclination to obey; in reality the time was fractional.

"Quick—out with it," he whispered as he twisted the end of the revolver against the fellow's head with a corkscrew motion that made him wince.

"I fell off th' bridge," he finally croaked in tones loud enough for his companions on the barge to hear.

A loud guffaw greeted his explanation as to the cause of the alarm.

"Are you hurt?" questioned the man on the bridge.

"No."

As if in confirmation of his statement that he was all right, the sound of some one splashing about in the water could be heard.

It was Bruce wading ashore.

The guard's rough associates were evidently satisfied as they turned and filed back through the open door.

It closed with a bang, and Bailey's hair once more laid down in plastered placidity. It had been standing on end.

Bruce had now made his way to the platform, the water dripping from his clothes and sloshing from his shoes with every step.

"Any damages sustained, chief?" asked Bailey.

"Nothing except a good ducking. That's bad enough."

"How did it happen?"

"A section of the flooring was pushed back from the cross piece so it would tip the moment any one set foot on it," replied Bruce.

"Are you going to try it again?"

"I certainly am. In the meantime let me congratulate you on your cleverness. I am proud of you."

"So am I. Any medals?"

"No—but the night is young. Keep up your good work. You may get your decoration at sunrise."

"If we are not shot at the same glad-some hour. I tell you, Bruce, a human life is cheap with this gang of pirates."

"No flat notes there, Bailey. Buck up on your courage. I am going to commence my trip all over, and I want you at your best. It's the unexpected that demands resourcefulness, and if anything goes wrong it will be up to you to think quick."

Saying which Bruce once more started out along the footpath.

Upon reaching the trick span which had thrown him into the Hudson, he carefully adjusted the movable section, so it rested upon the crosspiece. Then he tested it before going forward.

At the other end of this span he found the crude mechanicad device which had been responsible for the ringing of the bell: an upright of wood nailed to the edge of the plank floor. To this a rope was attached.

As a measure of safety, Bruce cut the line.

Now and then a board would creak as he picked his way over the makeshift bridge, but the blast from the transatlantic liner would have been dwarfed to the squeak of a tin whistle in competition with the wild medley of riotous joy aboard the barge.

Upon reaching the bow of the ancient craft, Bruce found that the windows were much higher than appeared from the shore, but by climbing to the rail a good view of the interior was possible.

In doing this his head narrowly missed the ship's bell, which was fastened to the superstructure of the barge. Had the question of haste been less imperative, he would have taken the precaution of drawing the bell rope to the bow of the barge and disposing of it inside the rail. It was a strange scene that greeted Bruce as he peered through the dirt-grimed window.

Near the center of the big barnlike room was a brick platform, about a foot high and possibly six feet square, serving as the hearth for a roaring, crackling fire. Just above it was a great iron kettle swinging from an old-fashioned crane. A huge negro, stripped to the waist, was stirring the steaming contents.

Around the boiling kettle were at least fifteen of the toughest specimens of humanity Bruce had ever seen—men of grizzled beards and evil countenance. They might have been the very dregs and scourgings of the proverbial seven seas. All were intent upon the negro's work as he stirred the pottage, all gesticulating and talking, except as they paused long enough to honor the passing bucket of steaming punch. A wave of disgust swept over Bruce. Was

this the scene he had ventured to much to view—a commonplace orgy of gluttony? Had his persistency, after all, only led to a steaming kettle of food?

In vain he looked for one familiar face: Connors—Captain Jake—Eddie Carbon—Emile. With mind intent upon grasping for something tangible—something that would not leave him completely stranded—he began to search each recess and shadow of the big room, if such it could be called. A tangled mass of nets and cordage came under his observation for the first time. They were hanging from the rafters near the stern.

At that particular moment it was a valuable discovery to Bruce, as it gave notice of ownership. These nets were undoubtedly the property of Shad Roe Martin—the negro who had piloted the four-wheeled craft, in which Connors had been imprisoned, from New York to Hoboken, and it was fair to assume that the stalwart black engaged in stirring the steaming caldron was none other than he.

The nets were evidently serving as improvised curtains to screen certain individuals who were about to participate in the barbaric feast, or ceremony, as all eyes were now directed toward the swaying center. Then the tangled cordage parted, and Eddie Carbon came forward amid the wild shouts of the frenzied crowd. In his arms he carried the quaint-looking chest that Bruce had seen lifted from the small boat that afternoon when the sailors took it aboard the barge.

Placing it on the deck near the brick hearth, Carbon returned to the opening through the curtain of nets. Here, with mock ceremony, he held up his hand for silence; then, with a dramatic pause, he reached over to draw aside the curtain. For the second time the rotting bulkheads of the old wreck quivered with the volume of sound that greeted the entrance of a man who was not very steady on his feet. In fact, Eddie Carbon had to render assistance or he would have fallen to the deck.

Bruce saw a hard-visaged man of fifty-five or more. In the day of his prime—now passed—he might have been registered

as short and stocky, but years of indulgence at both the board and the bowl had caused him to settle physically. There had been a gravitation of parts until he resembled an inverted top. Aye—a “salty old top” who looked as though he would welcome any rewinding that would help him to spin along for a few years more. It was Captain Jake.

In his excitement over the discovery Bruce narrowly missed slipping from the rail. His mind swept back to the occasion of their first meeting at Connors's Athletic Club; back to the student days at New Brunswick, when this same Captain Jake—the rover—the romancer—would hold the little group of students spellbound with wonderful tales of foreign ports, of bloody encounters, and weird stories of African mysteries.

But these memories were thrust back into the past where they belonged. Something of greater importance than the appearance of Captain Jake through the opening was about to take place. The curtain was ready to part for the third time. A look of expectancy was upon every face. Captain Jake had been led to what seemed to be the seat of honor near the brick hearth, and Eddie Carbon was engaged in removing several small packages from the open chest.

The moving net now proclaimed impatience on the part of the one about to step forth; but, even so, the spectators were loath to dispense with the dramatic prelude.

The negro at the kettle waved his hand toward one of the dark recesses of the barge, and two of his race and color came forward with crude-looking drums. They took their positions—one on the right, the other to the left of the blazing hearth—and commenced to beat their barbaric instruments as an accompaniment to the quavering notes they voiced. Then the nets were swept aside, and Bruce saw that which caused him to question his vision. The giant negress stepped through the opening.

The very impossibility of it staggered him. It was incredible to think of her capture at the moment they were banking

on her safety. Disregarding the danger of discovery, he pressed closer to the window. He even attempted to rub away the accumulated dust, that he might assure himself that it was all real.

For a brief space she remained motionless and the flickering lights from the open hearth danced about her huge form. Then she slowly came forward—her barrel-like arms lifted above her head, feet shuffling, body swaying, in a clumsy attempt to follow the rhythmical beat of the drums.

Bruce's brain was likewise throbbing in unison with them. How had the negress eluded both himself and Bailey? Who had assisted her aboard the barge? What was the significance of the barbaric scene before him?

In vain he tried to correct what he thought might be the result of an excited vision. It was useless—confusion had mastered him. An array of what might be termed half truths now began to assail him. The conversation of the men in the lane, wherein they had referred to their inability to reach the barge with their launch on account of the shallow water; the conveyance waiting at that very moment at the foot of the bluff; all these were directly or indirectly associated with the latest and most perplexing phase of the mystery he was trying to fathom.

The negress was now within a few feet of the hearth, and silence had fallen upon her devotees, or admirers—whichever they might prove to be.

As Bruce pressed forward to peer through the greasy, smoke-glazed window, he began to understand why the sight of the negress had affected him so strangely. Surprise alone would not account for it, as he had received too many of them since becoming involved in Connors's affairs. It was her unnatural size that appalled him; this, and her theatric entrance. He wondered if in the excitement of escape from the Cracker Pot he had misjudged her monstrous weight and girth?

Perhaps the pane of glass he was directing his gaze through was distorting his vision. He would try the other window—it was only a few feet away. In moving along the rail he forgot that the soles of his shoes were

wet and slippery. It was an unfortunate lapse of memory.

Both feet shot from under him, and the law of self-preservation did the rest, for he elected to drop to the deck inside the rail rather than take a second plunge into the Hudson.

If fate deliberately selected that particular moment for his fall, it was, to say the least, splendidly chosen, so far as the interests of those within the barge were concerned. Whatever the negress intended to do or say, they were waiting amid silence. Then came the crash of his fall, and, to make matters worse, his feet became entangled in the bell rope. A wild clang of the bell followed.

The hoarse shout of anger and dismay that arose within the barge must have vibrated to the splintered keel of the old hulk, and far quicker than it takes to relate the deck swarmed with a mob of maddened ruffians.

It was Bruce's turn now to do some quick thinking.

To attempt an escape over the footpath would be folly. A dozen guns might rake this line of retreat. Had the advantage of daylight been with him, he might have taken the risk, knowing that Bailey stood at the other end of the bridge with their prisoner's revolver, which would have been of some use in holding back his pursuers.

This, however, was not to be considered, and it left but one alternative. That was to slip over the side into the Hudson. His decision had been made none too quickly, as ships' lanterns and flaming torches began to appear on deck—a very devils' dance of bobbing lights.

There was no thought of danger in Bruce's mind as he pushed out into the black waters and blacker night: his only concern was for Bailey. Through it all the latter had remained on the small platform at the shore end of the bridge, guard'ng his prisoner. Beyond the thud of Bruce's fall, and the clang of the bell, he had no knowledge of what actually had occurred. That Bruce had succeeded in gaining a view of the interior of the barge, he knew—because the dim outline of his head at the barge window had conveyed this intelligence

With every nerve taut, he listened for the rattle of planks that would tell of Bruce's approach over the bridge.

The seconds—that seemed hours—went by. Not a sound from Bruce; not even the creak of a board or a call for assistance. Lights were now coming toward him over the bridge. Of heavy oaths and imprecations there were a plenty, but no word or tone of exultation that would indicate Bruce's capture.

But one conclusion was possible—Bruce had gone overboard.

For the safety of his friend Bailey had never a thought. He knew that Bruce could swim like a duck. As for himself, it would be easy to elude the oncoming horde of thoroughly aroused ruffians by moving off into the darkness.

But what of his prisoner? To leave him bound and gagged would publish their night's work. Besides that, if his associates from the barge failed to find him they might be tricked into the belief that he had again tumbled into the Hudson. Perhaps a little daring and nerve might retrieve the bungling errors that had been made. Once more his reputation for quick thinking was to be sustained.

He would take his prisoner with him.

A few strokes with his knife and the fellow's legs were free.

"Come—and not a word out of you! Quick!" Bailey whispered.

Shoving the man in front of him, he pushed off into the darkness, moving southward along the shore, in the direction from which they had approached the barge. He had every reason to believe that Bruce went

over the rail on that side, as his head was last seen bobbing against the glare of light from that window.

The foremost man from the barge was now halfway over the bridge and was straining his calendar of profane epithets as he loudly called upon the guard for some explanation of the disturbance. Not from the guard, but down shore—the direction in which Bailey was moving—came an answering "*Halloo!*"

The moment Bailey heard it he knew that another error was to be scored. He was moving into danger rather than away from it. It had been the most natural thing in the world for him to start back along the shore in that direction, but in the excitement he had forgotten the man who was waiting at the foot of the lane—the horseman who had remained to watch over the conveyance while his companions sought the festivities aboard the barge.

The decoration that Bailey was to receive at sunrise volplaned into oblivion. His situation could not have been worse. Behind him the mob of enraged cutthroats from the barge, some of whom had now reached the shore; in front, one of their number ready to assist them; to his right, the tall cliffs; on his left, the river.

It was useless to hunt for a position of advantage on that flat strip of shore. There was none. He broke open the chamber of his revolver to count the number of cartridges he could depend on.

Then Bailey made use of an expression that was void of delicacy—a copper-lined classic that befitted the situation. The cartridge chamber of his revolver *was empty!*

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

INSEPARABLE

"If only you were not so jealous!"

You've often said.

Needless to wish it any longer—

Jealousy's dead!

"But where is Love?" you ask. Ah! still you're

Not satisfied?

Know, then, with Jealousy's expiring,

Love also died!

Ida M. Thomas



Dollars and Drinks

By LYON MEARSON

LET it be known that all that is herein after chronicled happened in the days before the Eighteenth Amendment was abroad in the land, when the name of Volstead was not one to command the attention of kings and the profanity of the proletariat, and when bootlegging was not the crowded profession it is to-day.

In one of Wilde's plays a character, upon being told that he is lying in the gutter, remarks that perhaps he is—but he is looking at the stars. Which means, in everyday, unallegorical language, that a man may have ideals regardless of his circumstances. A man's body and his brain may be for sale, but his soul is his own, and so long as he follows the gleam within him he is yet his own man.

Such a man was Neil MacNeil, superintendent of construction for the Campbell Building Company—the best superintendent of construction they ever had or ever hoped to have. No man could get more out of a crew than MacNeil; no man was better loved by the men who worked for him,

principally because they knew there was nothing he asked any of them to do that he could not do himself; nothing he required of them that he had not done himself at some stage in his career.

A big, rawboned fighting Scotchman, ready for a blow or a joke, or both, accessible to the meanest of his underlings and unafraid of the most powerful of his superiors, with a laugh or an oath ever on his lips—usually both—and with a knowledge of the building business second to none; that was Neil MacNeil, the son of Angus, the son of Andrew, the son of Sandy. This was the line of MacNeil's descent, men handy with their fists and with a knowledge of the real purpose of Scotch whisky.

Which is where MacNeil's weakness came in. He was an ideal superintendent of construction—when he superintended. There were times, however, unheralded by any warning whatsoever—irregular of occurrence—when he did not superintend for three or four days in a row. At such times he was full to the skin with whisky tasting

of Scotch fog and Highland heather; at such times he was apt to be found in any place in New York except one—the place where his job was.

This weakness of MacNeil's was the cause of his losing more than one job, and he knew he would lose more in the years to come, but he was a lone man, with no wife nor child, and when the desire for strong drink came upon him whisky meant more than a job. Strangely enough, however, the Campbell Building Company had never discharged Neil MacNeil, though there had been threats, warnings, and plain man-to-man talks with old Campbell, whom MacNeil knew when he was nothing but a puddler—and whom he feared about as much as a puddler, whatever that may be.

The truth of the matter was that Campbell recognized the fact that MacNeil, with his faults, was a better superintendent of construction than he would be able to find in many a long day's search. There were delays, sometimes, in the completion of a building on which MacNeil worked, but when it was finished, man! It was a perfect piece of work. So MacNeil worked for the Campbell Building Company, and went off on his irregular bays when he pleased—sometimes close together, sometimes many months between.

Then came the contract for the building of the great Giltmore Hotel—the biggest thing of its kind seen in this country since the Pennsylvania Terminal was finished. It was to be the biggest hotel in the world—as you know it is. Over a year was to be spent in its construction, and the Lord himself only knows how many millions of dollars; which millions of dollars you and I will eventually return to the pockets of the owners, if we haven't yet. Why, I knew a man who only stayed there a week, and when his bill came around he— But we won't discuss that now. We have to chronicle the affecting story of Neil MacNeil, and of how Neil MacNeil preserved the purity of his soul.

Neil MacNeil, being the best superintendent of construction the Campbell Building Company had, was put in charge of the Giltmore work. Old Campbell knew that, even if he could not depend upon his su-

perintendent to keep sober, at least when the work was finished it would be acceptable to any one—and this was an important job.

He had a long talk with MacNeil before the work started. It was important to the company that the job be finished on time—there were penalties, and so forth. It was therefore important that MacNeil keep straight. He impressed this on him. MacNeil said he would do his best.

II.

THE week after excavation work was started on the great Giltmore plot—it was solid rock, like a great deal of Manhattan, and required an enormous amount of blasting in small charges—old Campbell stopped in at the superintendent's shanty on his way to the office. He wanted to hold converse with MacNeil.

When he entered the shanty there was nobody there but Tim O'Sullivan, assistant superintendent—an excellent man, but not a MacNeil, being old and not able to break a pick handle on a man's head with the same verve. He was poring over the blue prints, scarcely looking up when his door opened.

"Tim," inquired old Campbell, wiping his silk hat with the sleeve of his morning coat, "where's Mac?"

Tim looked up at him, eying the silk hat with distinct disfavor, to say nothing of the disgust with which he regarded the pink-and-white spotted necktie.

"He is not here, boss," remarked Tim shortly, and turned to his work again, hoping that would end the matter, yet knowing that there was no chance.

"Tim, look at me, you old scoundrel," persisted Campbell. "I didn't ask you whether he was here or not—I can see for myself he is not here. Is he—" He looked at Tim significantly.

Tim knew what he meant and Campbell knew that Tim knew what he meant.

"Ye shpeak in riddles, Misther Campbell. Ye shpeak av things beyant me province an' 'tis not I—"

"Shut up! Is he off on a bay?"

Fairly cornered, Tim knew that there was no use in lying, because MacNeil himself

would have been the first to report his absence and the reason therefor.

He nodded his head. "I regret to report that Mac is at prisint lookin' on th' Scotch whin ut is smoky, Misther Campbell—a deplorable thrait whin beer is so chape an' there is so much Irish whisky to be had—"

"When did he start, Tim?" inquired Campbell, placing his silk hat thoughtfully on his head, where it so fascinated Tim that he could scarcely take his eyes off it. When he was finally able to wrench away his gaze from the shining tile, he answered him.

"Yisterday noon. Had it av been Irish—"

"Never mind; I know all about your Irish whisky," broke in Campbell, troubled. He could see that there was to be no peace of mind for him while the great Giltmore Hotel was being erected under the supervision of the erratic Neil MacNeil.

"He'll be back the day after to-morrow," remarked Campbell dryly. "Keep the work going until he shows up—then tell him I want to see him at the office." He turned and went out, knocking his silk hat against the top of the door, greatly to the joy of Tim O'Sullivan.

III.

TRUE to Campbell's statement, MacNeil was back at work on the next morning but one, unregenerate, and with an awful headache.

"Tim," he asked, "has the old man been around?"

Tim nodded. "He has, silk kelly an' all."

"What did he say?"

"He remarked," said Tim, "that ye wuz th' scum av th' earth, an' deservin' av no dacint man's thrust, t' say nothin' av—"

"He was right, Tim," interrupted MacNeil. "Who are you, anyway, to disapprove of what a Scotchman says? What else did he say?"

"He said ye wuz t' come to th' office an' hold converse with him as soon as ye showed up."

"He did, did he?" MacNeil looked up thoughtfully. So he was to be discharged! Well, all right—it would not be the first

time. He knew he was to be discharged—otherwise Campbell would not have asked him to come to the office. He would have stopped in and spoken to him here, on the job, as usual.

"As I've told ye often, Mac, if ye wud only learn to inhale a civilized drink, such as Irish—"

"Forget it, young feller, me lad," broke in MacNeil. "Remember, you're talking to your superior. And, besides, it takes education to like Scotch whisky—what would you know about such things, with the smell of the peat bog still in your hair? Me, I'm off to the office—I'll be back when I return, Tim," he added with dignity.

Campbell, in the severe mahogany and glass privacy of his luxurious quarters, glanced up at the entrance of his superintendent of construction, who disdained such slight things as being announced by office boys—the young scuts.

"Hello, chief—want to see me?" he breezed.

"I do, Mac," said his employer shortly, putting aside his pen and assuming his severest air. He gazed at him for a moment, judicially and sternly. MacNeil gazed back, but said nothing.

It was Campbell who broke the silence finally.

"Mac," he said, "suppose I were to discharge you?"

MacNeil shrugged his shoulders. "I've been discharged by better men than you, Geordie," he said. If one were to be discharged he might just as well be defiant about it.

Campbell laughed outright. "Mac," he said, "you're an irresponsible scalawag—and I don't know what to do about you."

"Then why bother, Geordie?" asked MacNeil innocently.

"Well, it's this Giltmore job. It's on my nerves, Mac. It's going to cost me a lot of money if it isn't finished on time—and with you going off and getting pickled every now and again, there's a darned good chance that we won't get through on time. I can't depend on you, Mac—that's the long and short of it. And yet, there's nobody I'd rather have on that work—if I could only be sure you'd stay on the job."

"Oh, I will, boss," MacNeil assured him. "I'm off the stuff this time for—"

"Nonsense," cut in his employer. "I've heard that so often from you on the morning after that it doesn't mean anything. This time you have to lay off the stuff—or it's all off between you and me."

"Have to?" queried MacNeil, a little stiffly. He was not used to having people address him in that tone of voice.

"Yes, have to!" snapped back the other. "Mac, how would you like to have five thousand dollars—all in a lump?"

The superintendent of construction looked at him inquiringly. "I don't know," he drawled at last. "I never had that much at once—I guess it would buy an awful lot of Scotch—"

"No, you must lay off the Scotch if you want to get this money. I've had an idea, Mac. I'm going to make you a proposition. If you don't take a drink for a year from to-day, I'll give you a bonus of five thousand dollars. If—"

"And if I do," broke in MacNeil calmly.

"You get discharged," said Campbell shortly. "Get me—discharged!"

The other nodded slowly. "I have to lay off for a year—"

"To get this five thousand dollars, Mac. Is it a go?"

"Or get discharged?"

"Yes," said Campbell. "Is it a go?"

"It's a go, Geordie, you old dollar-squeezer," said MacNeil, but there was a peculiar, unfathomable gleam in his gray eyes—a gleam that Campbell was to remember later and wonder about. "Now, if you don't mind, I have a certain little job of work to attend to at the great Giltmore Hotel, so I'll be going along. Well, so long—and don't drink any Scotch whisky; you're not used to it," he flung back as a parting shot. The door closed behind him.

Campbell picked up his pen again, but he did not write for a long time. He was thinking.

IV.

THE news of this curious proposition spread through the Campbell organization—Campbell himself told it to some of his intimates in the office, who in turn told it to

some of their intimates, and in a few days every intimate in the organization—which included every man in the outfit—knew about it.

All knew MacNeil, and practically everybody doubted his ability to earn the money. to say nothing of his willingness. MacNeil was an independent sort, but then again, MacNeil was a Scotchman—and to a Scotchman five thousand dollars was five thousand dollars. Nevertheless, the wise-ones shook their heads and said he would never do it. There would be some slip, at last—a momentary weakness, and it would be all off; because everybody knew that if MacNeil once got started on the imbibing of Scotch—let it be only one glass—nothing on earth could stop him from going the route except a sudden disappearance of the entire earthly supply of that presumably delectable beverage.

But, to the surprise of every one—except perhaps Campbell himself, who had never doubted the efficacy of his plan, being sure that the money would be a great enough inducement to the man—MacNeil was keeping straight and sober, and the work went on magnificently, ahead of schedule, a good, workmanlike job, if ever there was one.

The months swung by in their orderly rotation, one after the other, and summer succeeded spring, finally swinging into autumn, then winter; the great Giltmore Hotel ironwork was all up, raising its gaunt, ugly black head twenty-five stories above the teeming earth, alive with derricks, red-hot rivets flashing fifty yards deftly into a pail five hundred feet above the ground, the pounding of the riveters making day and night hideous in all the neighborhood: a bare skeleton triumphant above the squat house that flanked it on all sides, ready to be clothed and turned over to its owners.

And in all this time MacNeil did not drink. He kept strictly and absolutely sober, much to the wonderment of all. Even Tim ventured to remark on it once in a while, as to a man who was selling himself for gold.

"Some people is so crazy fer money," he remarked to MacNeil, "that they will give up their indipindince an' their honor fer that same, not menshunin' no names—"

"Ah, what do you know about such things?" bantered MacNeil, knowing well that he himself was meant by this clumsy innuendo.

Many were the jokes hurled at MacNeil in those days, when it began to look certain that he was winning the fight. He took them all in good part. Even Campbell condescended to comment on it when he stopped in to see his superintendent.

"Good boy, Mac," he said. "Keep up the good work."

"What good work?" inquired MacNeil innocently.

"Why, you know—that offer I made you—"

"Oh, that!" laughed MacNeil, but said no more.

And so the work drew on to its conclusion, and it became an accepted fact that MacNeil would earn his bonus. Campbell, always theatrical, decided on a spectacular way of presenting MacNeil with his check.

The great Giltmore Hotel, finished and ready to be turned over to its owners on April 25, would be completed—so far as the Campbell firm was concerned—on the morning of the 24th. Now it happened that the 24th of April was the day on which MacNeil's year of abstinence ended—that is, if he kept sober until midnight of that day, he had earned the money.

Campbell, jubilant at the successful conclusion of the work, announced a great dance in the ballroom of the great Giltmore for the night of the 25th of April—a ball to which were invited the employees of the Campbell Building Company and their friends. He intended, at the stroke of twelve, to call MacNeil to the middle of the floor and present him with a check for five thousand dollars.

V.

THE night of the ball—it was a gala occasion for those who worked for the Campbell Building Company and for their friends. Everybody was there early, with the exception of one person—Neil MacNeil, son of Angus MacNeil. At eight thirty, when the gayety began, he had not yet come. It caused no comment, because it was early. At nine thirty he had not ar-

rived, but still Campbell was not uneasy—MacNeil had promised to be there. He knew that he was to get his check that night—it was common knowledge. He would certainly be there; he had promised that faithfully, and MacNeil was a man who kept his promises.

At ten thirty MacNeil had not yet come, and neither had he turned up at eleven. Campbell turned to Tim O'Sullivan, resplendent in his Sunday suit, a little restive.

"Where's Mac?" he asked.

"He'll be here," replied Tim calmly. "Rist assured av that—he wud not miss this here scene av gayety fer annything, I'm thinkin'—not him, bliss his sowl."

There was much speculation, and at eleven thirty practically everybody had given up hope—when he came. It was Tim who saw him first, standing uncertainly at the door.

"Mac!" he shouted, and everybody turned to look.

Hatless, hair disheveled, collar half off, coat unbuttoned, face flushed, a triumphant grin was on Neil MacNeil's face.

He was in complete possession of the most glorious jag seen in that vicinity in many a day. He was absolutely and carefully drunk. In a complete silence he skated and staggered across the hall to where Campbell, angry and silent, awaited him.

Carefully he navigated over the slippery floor to Campbell in an expectant silence.

"H'lo, Geordie, old top!" he shouted in a mellow, care-free voice. "How's ev'ry little thing—"

"Mac!" burst out the voice of Campbell. "This is a helluva way to—"

"Sh'all ri', me lad: sh'all ri'!" answered MacNeil. "Jus' wanted t' show you I could do it for my own shelf-respect—thass all—not for your dirty money. Nobody can buy Neil MacNeil—on with th' dansh—let joy be unrefined, old kidsh—le'sh go!" He noticed everybody staring at him silently. He almost sobered. He spoke coherently.

"I can keep sober because I want to, Geordie Campbell—but not for any man's money," he said. "Now that you know that, I'll never take another drop of booze as long as I live."

He hasn't—



The Dance of Death

By FRED JACKSON

Author of "The First Law," "The Third Act," "The Diamond Necklace," etc.

CHAPTER XX.

ALL MABLE KNEW.

MABLE scowled as she entered the little office and found both Mr. and Mrs. George Stuyvesant Milburne there. She sensed unpleasantness and trouble—and Mable hated trouble—trouble of any kind. She liked things comfortable all around. Accordingly, as she crossed the threshold and came face to face with Louise, she flashed a warning glance toward George as though to remind him that she counted upon him for protection.

There are very few men who could have found it in their hearts to ignore such a glance from such a delectable little morsel as Mable was at that instant. In her fluffy black dancing frock that just veiled her figure without hiding it, her frosty white arms

and throat bare, dazzling by contrast, her great dark eyes and three-cornered baby's mouth; her brilliant, fiery, scintillating mop of hair—she was ravishing. And she had that irresistible helplessness about her. George hurried toward her with his most masterful manner.

"Don't be alarmed," he said; "no one is going to harm you or distress you!"

She smiled, then, gratefully, and glanced curiously at Louise. Louise did not smile. She regarded George and Mable with vague detachment. She often viewed performances that way at the theater.

It was Garry, then, who took the situation in hand.

"We asked you to come here," he said, "because we want you to answer a question—quite a simple question, really, but an important one. So please be sure when

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you answer it that you are telling the absolute and simple truth. Has Mr. Milburne left your party during the evening?"

Mable looked from Garry to George Milburne.

"Why, no—I don't believe so," she answered slowly, "unless it was when I left the table to dance!"

"Then you cannot declare upon your oath that he did *not* leave the table," put in Louise Milburne eagerly.

"No," admitted Mable, and then added curiously, "why do you ask?"

Garry and Silvers exchanged a questioning glance. They were undecided about revealing the truth—but George Milburne was troubled by no such uncertainty.

"Because Guy da Costa has been murdered here to-night, and they suspect me of murdering him," he said.

She stared, round-eyed, her thick lashes brushing her cheek.

"*Murdered!*" she gasped. "*Guy?* Good Heavens!" And then, with a wise little shake of her bobbed red head; "Well, I often *thought* he'd be lucky to get away clean with the deals *he* pulled off! But why suspect *you?*" she protested, as that phase of the matter dawned upon her. "Why should *you* want to murder Guy?"

"He threatened his life—only to-night—at dinner," said Garry.

"Ah—at *dinner!*" nodded Mable. "Perhaps he *did*, then! He had an idea that Guy was interested in *Mrs.* Milburne; but when I saw how upset he was about it, I told him the *truth!* And after that he didn't give Guy another thought. He chuckled over it all the time Guy and I were dancing."

"Chuckled over *what?*" asked Louise.

"The game Guy was playing with you," said Mable.

"*Game?*" repeated Louise, raising her arched brows.

"Do you mean that Guy da Costa was not interested in *Mrs.* Milburne?" asked Garry.

"Of course not—not *really!*"

Louise regarded the red-haired girl intently.

"You seem to speak with some conviction," she said slowly.

"I do," answered Mable. "You see, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but this seems to be a pretty serious mess, and Guy told me all about it only this afternoon. That's funny, don't you think? He dropped in at my place about five for cocktails, and we got talking. You know how you will when you've had a couple of drinks and you're feeling comfy?"

Louise did not nod understandingly, did not even alter the expression of her face by a shade; she merely waited. Garry broke the silence.

"Well?" he prompted.

"Well, Guy and I—we understand each other pretty well. He always had his eye on the main chance, and so had I; and he was looking out for himself, just as I was. When you're depending on the public for support, you've got to look sharp, because somebody else was the favorite yesterday, and there's going to be a new one to-morrow. You can bank on that! Some girls go in for 'love'! I've always gone in for something more substantial and lasting—like money or jewels or furs or stock. A girl has got to look ahead, you see, and a fellow like Guy, too. Of course *he* never expected a finish like *this!* So he was looking to feather his nest against the time when he wouldn't be able to dance any more—or somebody else would be getting the crowd. The best way he could figure to do that was to marry some wealthy girl. Katherine Kendall was the one he was trying to land!"

"He told you this?" cried Garry.

"Yes. He said he was just playing *Mrs.* Milburne along for what he could get out of her—and out of knowing her well. He said he'd looked into her affairs and she had very little money in her own right. It was mostly George's money, and *Mrs.* Milburne mightn't get a sou if she got a divorce. He said he couldn't see himself taking a chance like that—not with the Kendall girl in the running. He said he was just waiting for the right moment to stage an elopement."

"It isn't true!" cried Louise passionately. "This girl is lying to clear George. Don't you *see?* They think if they can prove that Guy didn't love me—George"

would have had no motive. But *I* can prove Guy *did* love me. I have his letters—love letters!"

"Sure. Why *shouldn't* he write you love letters if you wanted them?" asked Mable naively. "He had nothing to fear. He knew *you* would never use them against him. And they might encourage *you* to write some back to *him* that *he could use!*"

Louise smiled coldly.

"I'm afraid, my girl, your story won't quite convince a jury—against my love letters—in the light of your relations with George!"

"If you're afraid of anything," said George, "it's facing the *truth*—that this rascally Sicilian was only *using* you to further his own ends!"

"It was the Kendall girl he was using," said Louise, "to safeguard my reputation. He told me so, over and over again—and wrote it to me, too!"

"You persist, then, in this mad belief that I killed him? You purpose to press the charge?" cried Milburne.

"Unless I am *convinced* that the guilt lies elsewhere," answered Louise. "Convinced, too, by unassailable proof!"

For an instant he was inarticulate with rage. Then—

"You *hell-cat!*" he roared, his face growing almost purple. "You'd drag my name in the dirt without a second thought! You'd flaunt your shame before the eyes of the world—from the front of every newspaper in town! Maybe you'd go on the stand and tell your story. You—*Moll!* Thinking about avenging your dirty, low-down lover instead of what you owe to my family and my name. And this is what I get for picking you out of obscurity and putting you where you are. I set you too high. You can't be happy in my class—among my friends."

Louise observed him with perfect calmness and some curiosity.

"Your friends?" she repeated. "Miss—er—Scott—and the rest?"

"You leave me out of this!" cried Mable.

"My dear George," said Louise, "the obscurity you picked me out of was a happy and respectable home in Philadelphia,

where my family has lived since Colonial days—and the eminence you lifted me to was the proud place by your side, which I have shared with Miss Scott, and Miss Olcott, and God knows how many others. Really, you know, for one who spends his nights in such places as this, you are being most illogical and inconsistent and absurd when you speak of *my* dragging your name in the dust. I have been infinitely more particular and discreet than you have been—infinitely!"

"If I had known all this at dinner time," he answered, choking, "I should not even have thought of killing Da Costa. I should have killed *you!* I wish I had. I only wish I had!"

"*Milburne!*" cried Silvers, horrified. And—

"*George!*" gasped Mable.

"Yes," said Louise, "it is really too bad you didn't, my dear George. It would have been better all around—even for me. What a pity you only get these inspirations when it is too late!"

He was speechless.

Garry, studying him, was unable to decide whether he had been guilty of the murder or not. He was precisely the sort of man who would have felt obliged to cleanse the stigma from his family name by just such means—if he had credited Guy's relationship with Louise; precisely the sort to safeguard himself, too, beforehand, by arranging for Mable to supply the necessary alibi; and Mable would have supplied it, too, for a price, in spite of her boasted intimacy with the murdered man. On the other hand, their story *might* be true. It was a difficult problem to decide.

The most baffling thing about life is that one *never knows* whether some one else is telling the truth or not! One feels that it is the truth or one does not! One is convinced by evidence or one is not—but one *never really knows!* We can't creep into another's mind and investigate. We must just *believe* or *disbelieve*.

A woman says "I love you!" She says it with melting eyes, and we believe. Perhaps we go through life believing—and everything she says or does seems to indicate that what she has said she means,

But we never know. What goes on in her secret mind and heart—only *she* knows—and God.

So now Garry stared at Milburne—and wished that he could see into the mind behind those angry, shifting eyes.

Did he kill Guy da Costa to avenge his honor, or did he not?

Did Da Costa mean to double-cross Katherine or Louise? If he could only be made to speak. But he was dead. His lips were sealed for all time. Who could say what his real intentions were?

"Suppose we send for Miss Kendall," said Silvers suddenly, "and see what she has to say in regard to this!"

"In regard to what?" asked Garry.

"This—this controversy. She may be able to supply just the evidence we need—the conclusive proof!"

"That's not a bad idea," chuckled Milburne. "Bring them face to face, eh? The women Da Costa loved! Quite a dramatic scene!"

"Bring her, if you like," said Louise. "As George so cleverly observes—we shall have one interest in common, at any rate. We both adored him."

Garry hesitated.

"Will you go and get her?" asked Silvers, "or shall I send a waiter?"

"I'll go," said Garry, slowly. He dreaded the effect of such a trying interview on the already overwrought girl; but he dared not object, lest he seem to be striving to conceal something. He turned and left the little office at once; but he frowned as he entered the supper room and let his eyes wander over the dancers.

He saw her almost at once—and cut in.

"Well?" she asked, breathlessly, and so appealingly that his heart ached for her. "Any news? Is it over?"

"Not yet," he said gravely, and winced as he saw the light of hope die in her beautiful eyes.

"Oh," she whispered, laying her head against him like a child; "I'm so tired. So-o tired!"

He held her close—so close that he could feel her heart beat.

"If I could only spare you all this," he murmured in agony in her ear.

"I know," she said, looking up at him gratefully. There was the brilliant glitter of tears in her eyes. "But I deserve it! I've been so foolish! It's my own fault—all of it. I deserve whatever happens. I've been so willful and—and I knew better. I just *wanted* to be wild and reckless and to court danger. I liked playing with fire. I was bored! And I was filled up with silly romances. I knew—always—that he wasn't my kind—that I didn't really care about him—not *really* with all that is *best* in me. I deserve whatever comes."

He laid his cheek against her hair.

"You've been splendid, though—to-night," he said. "So brave and strong. I'm proud of you. It takes a big person to admit to having been small. Any one who admits that he's been wrong is all right!"

"*Dear Garry,*" she whispered, tearfully.

"Do you think you could go through another interview—rather a trying one?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, and her voice did not falter, though it was an effort to keep it firm.

"Louise Milburne is here," he explained, "and Silvers wants to bring you face to face."

She nodded.

"Why not? I have nothing to hide from her or any one! I've told all I know; but I don't mind telling it again—or adding anything that might be of use."

"We'll stop near the door, then," he said, "and slip away. They're waiting in Silvers's office!"

An instant later he opened the door and ushered her in.

CHAPTER XXI.

LIAR, CHEAT AND CAD.

AS Katherine entered the little office, Louise Milburne raised her head, and the eyes of the two women met appraisingly—rather like swordsmen about to engage. It was not that there was animosity in either glance! It was just that combatants instinctively gage each other.

One was a woman of the world—worldly—a little embittered—very disappointed

in life as she had found it—perfectly poised and brilliantly self-assured. She was a perfect specimen of her type. The other was a girl, impulsive, young, with most of her illusions intact—and all of her freshness. With lips slightly parted, and eyes wide and a little wistful, she regarded Louise, and then the others, bravely. And there was something about her apparent innocence very different from Mable's. There was no artificiality about Katherine. She had adopted no pose. She was frankly herself. And so they all realized as she stood there, waiting—expectant—a little frightened, but striving hard not to betray that.

"Mrs. Milburne!" she said, by way of greeting to the older woman, and inclined her fluffy head slightly.

"How do you do?" said Louise Milburne, nodding in return. "I did not think you would remember me—though we have met, haven't we?"

"Yes. I remember you perfectly, of course," said Katherine.

Was she thinking of seeing Louise coming out of Guy's apartment at two o'clock one night? Garry wondered.

"I was quite *sure* we'd met," went on Louise slowly. "Where was it, by the way? At poor Guy's rooms—was it not? He gave such nice parties, didn't he?"

"I really don't know," answered Katherine. "I never went to his parties. And I've never been to his rooms."

"No?"

"No!" answered the girl, emphatically.

"He asked me—a number of times—and assured me that awfully nice people went; but I was not especially interested in Guy's friends."

Louise smiled.

"But you liked *Guy*, didn't you?" she murmured.

"No, I didn't like him," answered Katherine. "He *attracted* me. Did you *like* him?"

"I *loved* him," said Louise Milburne with sudden passion.

Katherine looked at her—and then slowly round at the others who were looking on as at a scene at a play—George Milburne, Silvers, Mable Scott, and Garry.

"I'm sorry," was all that she could find to say.

"I was planning to divorce my husband so that we could marry," went on Louise.

"Did Guy know of this?" asked Katherine.

George Milburne laughed; Louise's white face flushed.

"I'm sorry," cried Katherine contritely.

"I wasn't trying to be funny—or impertinent. I just wondered how far *he* was responsible in your decision to take such a step!"

"Do you suppose I would have planned such a thing if he had not urged it upon me?" asked Louise grimly.

"No—of course not! I cannot conceive of it. And yet—Oh, he was dreadful—he was beneath contempt! For he was urging me to marry him always!"

"He was urging you?" repeated Louise.

"Yes—truly. I have letters—any number of them—begging me. We scarcely met without his pleading with me to elope. And when I taxed him with being seen about a great deal with you, he—please forgive me, but I must tell the truth, mustn't I? He said that you sought him out—that you cared about him—and that he was only trying to be kind and not hurt you because you cared."

Louise laughed softly.

"That's exactly what he told me about you," she said. "And that his being seen so much with you safeguarded my reputation!"

"He was not sincere with either one of us, you see," said Katherine gravely, turning to the others. "He was deceiving us both. And God knows how many more."

"He was sincere with me," cried Louise. "I know it!"

"Oh, no!" protested Katherine, "he wasn't! Don't go on fooling yourself—and caring! He wasn't worth it! He wasn't worthy of you—or me! He *deserves* what he got—and he got it *because* he was the kind of man he was! You and I—we found him charming, handsome, romantic. And we let his physical appeal blind us to his lack of real virtues. But *now*—what's the use of refusing to face the truth? Let us forget him—the whole incident! Let us

recognize him for the liar and cheat and cad that he was."

She spoke passionately, with the fire and intensity of righteous indignation. For she had played fair with Da Costa! She had been quite frank with him always—and *he* had never been!

"I believe *you knew* that he really loved me—and *you* killed him!" cried Louise.

Katherine stood staring—speechless.

"Why, every word you've said convicts you," went on Louise fiercely. "I believe you found out that he'd been deceiving you—that it was hopeless—your passion for him—and you were so enraged you struck him down!"

"Nonsense!" cried Katherine. "I couldn't kill any one! As for Guy—I didn't really understand him until afterward! He was dead when I reached that little room, I tell you! And I went there, feeling about him as I had felt all along for months. It was only as I looked at him lying there—and things began to be revealed—that—that I reconstructed my impression of him. I don't know how it was, but whatever the spell was that he had cast over me seemed to pass with his passing, and I saw him plainly for the first time. It was a kind of hypnotism, I think. And when he died it left me free, and humiliated and ashamed."

"You say he was dead when you reached the little room?" asked Louise.

"Yes!"

"The little room where he was murdered?"

"Yes!"

"You were the first to reach him afterward?"

"Yes," said Katherine.

All this was news to Louise. She looked from the girl to the others.

"Well, I was wrong," she said. "It was not George who killed him—though he died because he was going away with me. Don't you see it—all of you? Why, it's so plain! Katherine Kendall struck him down—in a jealous rage—when she learned the truth!"

"I am afraid that you are right, Mrs. Milburne!" said Silvers.

"Nonsense, I tell you!" cried Garry.

"There wasn't time! I was at the foot of the stairs! She had scarcely entered the room when she screamed, and I followed her in!"

"How many minutes elapsed?" asked Silvers.

Garry reflected.

"Only two or three," said Katherine, with trembling lips. "I just went in—and I didn't see him. I crossed the room to the smoking room, but he wasn't there! Then I came back again—and saw him lying behind the door. And I screamed!"

"That would have taken *quite* a few minutes, I should say," put in Louise.

"But I didn't kill him! I didn't! *I didn't!*" whispered Katherine hoarsely.

She was near the breaking point, now. Garry laid his hand on her arm.

"Steady!" he begged gently.

"I should like a few moments talk with Miss Kendall—alone," said Silvers suddenly.

"Why?" asked Garry, facing him.

"Never mind why. I've been mighty patient with you! I've run the risk of getting myself in wrong with the police! I've given you time to look for evidence! I've gone just about as far as I'm going, and that's flat! Now, I want a talk with this girl alone, and if you're not satisfied with that I'll call the police! And I'll tell you one thing that's sure—they won't be as easy on her as I'll be!"

"Let him talk to me, Garry. Why not?" said Katherine.

He yielded.

"Very well," he said. "I'll wait just outside!"

"And we'll go back to our table, if nobody objects," said George Milburne. "I need a drink!"

He opened the door. Mable passed out. He turned to Louise.

"Will you join us, my dear?" he asked cynically.

"Thank you, no!" she answered calmly.

"Very well, my dear! Just as you please. See you later."

He was gone.

"Let me get you a table—in a corner somewhere," said Garry.

"Thank you."

She took his arm for support, and went with him into the supper room, where Charlie had a small table set up for her in a corner—and served champagne.

In the office, Silvers fixed Katherine with sharp, determined eyes.

"Now," he announced firmly, "we are going to get the *truth*!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

"I *VE told you the truth*," declared Katherine, earnestly; "all of it—everything I know, truly, Mr. Silvers!"

"I don't believe you!" said Silvers grimly.

"*Mr. Silvers!*" cried Katherine weakly.

"I don't believe you!" he repeated.

"You can take in this Carpenter fellow because he's in love with you, and he'd believe you if you told him the earth was square; but I'm *not* in love with you, see? I'm a plain, practical man, with a lot of common sense, and I say it looks to me like *you* killed Da Costa!"

"I didn't!" protested Katherine.

"Come on, now. The wisest thing for you to do is own up to it, and get a good lawyer and trust him and your youth and your sex and your looks to get you out of this mess! I tell you straight, it looks fishy, and you'll never get away with this story you're telling now!"

"But it's *true*!" cried Katherine.

"We've still got men on juries," said Silvers, "and as long as we have, there ain't one chance in a million of *your* going to the chair! After all, Da Costa *was* a rotter, and you've got money enough to get a damned good defense framed up for you. *He's* dead, and nobody much cares, as far as I can see, except maybe Mrs. Milburne, and I hate to think what public opinion is going to do to *her* if she goes on the stand and spills the tale she spilled here! So come along! Give us the real facts! I assure you I'm giving you exactly the same advice I'd give my own girl if she was in your place! The truth has a way of leaking out when you least expect it to—and in a way you never figured on—and then—

well—everything looks so much worse because you've been trying to hide things! Better take my tip, young woman, and give us the dope!"

"But I tell you I *have*! I've told you everything I know about the murder! *Everything!*"

"Well, maybe," he growled disgustedly; "but I don't believe you! And what's more—no *jury* will believe you, either!"

He walked the length of the little office disgustedly, biting on a cigar. His brow was knitted. His eyes glittered thoughtfully.

"Suppose you weren't connected with this case yourself," he said finally, "and somebody came to you with these facts: Here's a man found dead. A girl he's been making love to comes out of the room where he is and says she found him murdered. But he's still warm and bleeding. It's plain the deed has just been done! And there's no other exit to the room—no other way anybody could have got out. Then, added to this, the fact that he was planning to elope the same night with another woman. And, certain letters of hers are produced in which she admits she feels like killing him, and she's jealous of the other woman in question. Well, what would *you* say *yourself*?"

She was staring at him.

"Did you say *certain letters* can be produced? *My* letters?"

"Yes!" said he.

"My letters to Guy?"

"Yes! I have 'em in the safe, yonder. Want to see them?"

"Please!"

She sat breathless, her hands clenched together, while he manipulated the combination, opened the safe, found the letters, and brought them to her.

"Well?" he asked, holding them out in plain view.

She caught her lower lip between her teeth and bit into it. Her eyes were terrified. Tears slowly filled them.

"Well?" he said again. "They *are* yours, aren't they?"

"Yes," she said, throwing up her head.

"I won't lie. I don't care what you find out—or what you think—or what they

to me! I'm going to stick to the truth and tell only that! They are my letters written to Guy. And I was jealous of Louise—and I did speak about wanting to kill him. But I didn't kill him! I didn't! *I didn't!*"

She was on the verge of hysterics, now.

"Hold on!" he cried gruffly. "Tears ain't going to get you anything!"

She buried her head in her arms and began to sob. And Garry, hovering outside, opened the door and came in in violent haste. He glared at Silvers.

"Katherine! Katherine!" he whispered soothingly, laying his hand on her heaving shoulders. And turning, then, upon Silvers, shouted: "What have you been saying to her?"

"I've been telling her straight that the case against her looks bad—that everybody thinks she did it except you—and you'd think so, too, if you weren't in love with her! She's got to know how things stand, man, and face the music! This show is about over!"

"Don't listen to him—don't mind him," said Garry to the girl. "I believe in you! And I'll move heaven and earth to establish your innocence! You just trust me!"

With her head still hidden, she reached for his hand and clung to it.

"Well, you can do as you like about that," said Silvers. "After I've turned her over to the police! That's my duty and I'm going to do it!"

"Not yet, you're not," said Garry. "You gave me your word you wouldn't until daybreak, and we've got a little time left before then!"

"All right; but you don't think you're going to accomplish anything, do you?" said Silvers. "I tell you—the further you go into this thing the worse you make it look for the girl. Better get her to plead guilty and let some good lawyers frame up a defense for her!"

Katherine raised her tear-wet face.

"No!" she cried. "I won't have it! I'd rather die maintaining my plea of innocence than plead guilty and go free. I didn't kill him and I won't say I did. Not even if I can save my life that way!"

"Brave girl!" said Garry softly, with shining eyes.

She smiled at him.

"I've been a little fool," she said; "but I've only been foolish, not wicked, not lawless. And that's all over, now. I'm going to settle down into a sensible woman. You'll see!"

Silvers scratched his head.

"I wish to God I could believe her," he said grimly.

"I can—and *do!*" said Garry.

Katherine was rouging her lips again, powdering her nose, fluffing out her hair with dexterous little pats and tugs. Both men watched her thoughtfully.

"Well," said Silvers, finally, when she had finished, "what is the next move? I give you until daybreak, as I said I would. And I'll help you all I can. I can be *that* game, anyway!"

Garry stood wrapped in thought.

"First of all, Katherine must go back to the supper room, of course," he said.

"Must I?" she exclaimed wearily. "If you knew how hard it is to grin and dance, and feel all the time that you must faint with the suspense, the terror. I don't think I can stand much more of it!"

"You must," said Garry quietly.

"Very well," she agreed, with a catch in her breath. "I'll try! I'll go on until I drop."

He laid his hand on the doorknob to open the door and usher her back to the dance floor.

"And, meanwhile?" asked Silvers, arresting him.

Garry hesitated.

"Meanwhile," he said, "I don't know. I must think."

And then there came a knock on the door from the other side.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ENTER A CORSICAN.

GARRY opened it, and confronted a waiter who stood there, somewhat startled to find Silvers not alone.

He was a small, dark man, with strangely set dark eyes—eyes set somewhat askant in his face so that he looked always as though he were just starting to smile. He

had rather a long, pointed nose that gave him an inquisitive air; his mouth was large and never quite closed. For the rest, he wore the conventional green and gold livery that all the waiters at the King of Clubs wore. And yet he did not look exactly like the others. There was something about him that set him apart—something intangible, perhaps an air—a way of carrying his head—a way of tossing back his thick black hair. He was a type that one would be apt to remember. All this Garry observed in an instant as the man stood hesitating in the doorway.

"Mr. Silvers, please—pardon," he said somewhat awkwardly, and with a decided Italian accent. "I was looking for Mr. da Costa!"

"Da Costa?" repeated Garry, quickly. "What do you want of Da Costa?"

The waiter hesitated, scrutinizing Garry. "It's all right, Napoleon, speak up," said Silvers reassuringly, and added to Garry and Katherine, "He's Da Costa's personal bootlegger, and he suspects you of being government officials, I think!"

At that Napoleon smiled broadly.

"Oh, no," he protested, with a gesture that appealed for sympathetic comprehension. "But I saw that Mr. Silvers was with friends! And I hesitated to disturb him. For, after all, it was only Mr. da Costa that I want to speak with!"

"I'm afraid that's impossible, Napoleon. He's—gone," said Garry.

"Gone?" Napoleon regarded him with round, bright, shrewd eyes, for all the world like a bird. He turned from Garry to Silvers, inquiringly. "That's very strange," he said.

"Strange?" repeated Silvers.

"Well, you see, he told me to come right back!" explained Napoleon. "He said he would wait upstairs in the little room, but I have been up there, and the door, it is locked, and nobody come when I knock."

"I see. Da Costa sent you somewhere, did he?" asked Garry.

Napoleon observed him. His face was suddenly masklike. He was becoming aware of something unusual in the atmosphere—a strangeness. He was suddenly alert and on guard.

"Yes. Somewheres," he answered, non-committally.

"Where?" asked Silvers, obeying a glance from Garry.

"Well, you see," said Napoleon, "he couldn't go himself because he got to dance some more, and then there was the understanding that the doors, they remain locked. But Napoleon can go out the back way and nobody even miss him, you see?"

He smiled ingratiatingly.

"Go where?" asked Silvers again.

"On the errand for Mr. da Costa," said Napoleon.

"What errand?"

"Mr. da Costa tell me not to tell," said Napoleon. "I'm sorry. But Mr. da Costa, he get me this job, see. And he tell me not to tell *nobody*!"

"Just the same, you'd better tell," said Garry. "Da Costa's gone—and he isn't going to come back! And you're liable to get into trouble with the police if you don't tell what you know!"

"Mr. da Costa, he got in trouble with the police?" asked Napoleon.

"Never mind that! Where did he send you—and what for?" asked Garry.

Napoleon shrugged regretfully.

"I am Corsican," he said.

"Well, what has that got to do with it?" asked Silvers.

"Corsican," explained Napoleon, "never break his promise!"

Garry looked at Silvers in exasperation.

"Suppose they put you in jail if you refuse to tell what you know?" asked Silvers.

"I have been in jail before," said Napoleon casually. "Probably go again any-way sometime maybe! American jails not so bad. Italian jails, they are *jails*!"

He smiled.

"Then you persist in your refusal," said Garry.

"I'm very sorry," said Napoleon. "Too bad I am born Corsican."

Nobody could have been more polite or more obdurate.

Napoleon turned slowly to go; Garry stopped him.

"Wait just a minute. Answer me this, then: How long have you known Da Costa?" he asked.

Napoleon turned back with alacrity, now.

"Me, I have known him years and years. Since Italy," he said.

"You knew him on the other side?" cried Silvers incredulously.

"Yes. We was boys together, there," said Napoleon. "Mr. da Costa he is Tony Costello, then. Corsican, too, like me!"

"So his name was not really Da Costa?" cried Garry.

"Who knows?" asked Napoleon of the world at large.

"I mean it was not *always* Da Costa?"

"No. He was Tony Costello in Italy."

"And when he came over he changed it?" asked Garry. "Why?"

Napoleon frowned.

"Why you want to know all these things? Are you of the police?" he asked.

"No," answered Garry, "I am *not*. Mr. Silvers, here, and I, are working to keep the police out of this. So if you want to help us—and Da Costa—you'll tell us whatever you can!"

Napoleon was plainly troubled.

"How can I help when I don't know what Da Costa has done?" he asked.

"It is not what Da Costa has done," said Garry quietly, "it is what some one *else* has done to *him*."

Napoleon's eyes suddenly lighted with a gleam of understanding.

"Ah! Some one is after him! That is why he has gone away?" he cried.

"Exactly! Some one desired to kill him to-night," said Garry.

Napoleon's eyes narrowed. He nodded.

"That might happen to any man," he said. "In Corsica, killings occur every day. Where the blood is hot the passions are fierce!" He looked from one to the other meditatively. "But it is not like Tony to run away," he added. "That is not the Corsican way."

Suddenly he drew a long breath; his nostrils quivered; he threw back his head.

"No," he cried in a ringing voice. "He has not run away! Your English tricked me; but now I understand! Some one has not only desired to kill him! Some one has *killed* him!"

"Well—yes," Garry admitted.

"And you wish to keep out the police? You wish to avenge this deed yourselves? That is the Corsican way," he nodded approvingly. "The Vendetta! In this I will help!"

"Can you?" asked Katherine wistfully, coming forward for the first time.

Napoleon smiled broadly; his teeth flashed; and from somewhere in the vicinity of his hip pocket he drew suddenly a stiletto, wickedly narrow of blade, and sharp and bright!

"My blade," he said dramatically, "will drink the murderer's blood! I swear it!"

Garry seized his arm. Katherine shrank back with a little cry.

"No, thanks," he said. "We don't want any more killings. To turn him over to the law is vengeance just the same. And you won't have to pay the death penalty!"

"To the Corsican," said Napoleon, "the death penalty in such an affair like this is a great honor! Tony was my friend since years. Still, to live is pleasanter than to die. I will not use the stiletto! There are other ways!"

"But you have not told us yet on what sort of errand he sent you?" said Garry.

"I cannot tell! I have given my word as a Corsican," said Napoleon, "to tell no one of this errand! But I did not promise not to show what I was bringing back to him!"

He beamed as he thought of this way out of the difficulty, and produced from his pocket an envelope. Opening it, he displayed its contents.

"Steamer tickets for two—aboard the steamship Queen of Italy!" cried Garry. "Made out for Mr. and Mrs. Antonio Costello!"

"So he was intending to elope!" cried Silvers. "But with whom?"

They all looked at Napoleon. He shrugged.

"When one has money," he said, "women are devoted. And to Tony one was much like another. Maybe he had not yet decided. Eh?"

"Then you don't think a woman might have killed him?"

Napoleon shrugged.

"Maybe," he said; "but American

women are not so quick to kill as our women of Italy. Not so violent in love; not so violent in hate. I think it was a man killed Tony—some man he feared. When he called me to go on this errand—fear looked from his eyes."

"What makes you think it was a man he feared?" asked Garry. "Might it not have been a woman?"

"No! Tony was not afraid of women! He has turned back a knife before this with a smile and a kiss. And a sweet word will stop a bullet—if a woman hold the gun. But with a man it is different!"

Garry nodded.

"I dare say—yes!" he agreed. "But how are we going to find the guilty man in those crowded rooms downstairs?"

"I will find him," said Napoleon confidently.

"How?"

Napoleon shrugged.

"It is simple. I will find the man whose nerves are jumping—whose ears are listening—whose eyes dart this way and that! A man who has done a thing like this cannot look or act like other men. Sharp eyes can seek him out."

"And if you find him—you'll come and tell me?" asked Garry.

"When I find him," repeated Napoleon, "I will come and tell you!"

He turned, then, without another word, and vanished. And as he went his feet—in soft-soled waiters' shoes—made no sound. Katherine and Garry and Silvers looked at one another.

"I am glad he is not on *my* trail," said Katherine. "A man like that would stop at nothing. He's dreadful! Didn't you feel it? *Dreadful!*"

Garry nodded.

"Dreadful enough," he said, "to have committed the murder himself!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE HUNTER AND THE HUNTED.

SILVERS shook his head in perplexity. "If he had done it, and had got away, he would never have come back," he said; "especially with two tickets

for Italy in his pocket—and the boat sailing to-morrow!"

"Ah, but that's just what he would have done—a clever chap like that—to evade suspicion," smiled Garry. "At first—acting upon impulse—he might have run away; but on second thought he would have come straight back with the excuse that Guy had sent him on an errand; and he would have protested his friendship for Guy—and would have started in an earnest search for the murderer."

"Do you mean that you seriously suspect this man, now?" asked Katherine, wide-eyed.

Garry shrugged.

"I suspect *every one*—except you," he admitted.

She slipped her hand through his arm gratefully, and stood there clinging to him.

"It's true," said Silvers grimly, "these Wops will stick each other as quick as a wink—over practically nothing, too! Hot blood—as Napoleon himself said. You never can tell! They ain't like us at all! And Napoleon could easily have got that steak knife. I suppose he wouldn't have used his own stiletto for fear of it being recognized."

"But had he a *reason* for killing Guy?" asked Katherine.

"That's just it! We don't know," said Silvers.

"Well, no harm to wait a bit and see what he does," said Garry. "It's a long way from daylight still. Shall we go and dance?"

His eyes rested tenderly on the girl.

"If you wish," said she submissively.

Silvers nodded.

"You'd better. And I'll go and have a few words with a friend of mine down there. I haven't seen him for years, and thanks to this trouble, I've had to let him sit there all evening by himself."

They left the office and moved toward the supper rooms. To Katherine it seemed as if the night had already lasted a long lifetime; but the band was still playing blatantly, the musicians were still smiling cheerfully, and bursting into song when their enthusiasm got too great to endure in silence; the dancers still danced—if any

thing more violently than ever. They had, of course, been imbibing liquor steadily. Some of the men wore paper caps on their heads and looked inordinately silly in them! Paper tape of various colors had been thrown and still littered the floor and hung grotesquely from the chandeliers in long festoons. Colored lanterns bobbed about, and burst, one after another, with sudden, sharp reports. But the waiters kept tossing more in among the tables. These grown up revelers were easily amused, now—fascinated by the playthings of their children and grandchildren.

One gray-haired dowager had abandoned her dancing partner to go struggling after a miniature dirigible; while her partner—a youth in his twenties—pursued her amorously. One fat man was leaning out, with a cigar held ready, and was delightedly exploding the balloons as fast as he could. He was as pleased over each success as though it had been a victory on Wall Street!

A small, dark man, who looked like a South American, was doing strange steps, dipping and turning and whirling wildly, to the supreme satisfaction of the very thin, very blond, very notorious woman with him; and they seemed quite unconscious of the fact that they were colliding into other couples whose angry glances and murmured anathemas followed them. They seemed to be absorbed in exhausting some hellish energy that filled them with feverish unrest.

The room had grown very warm. The revelers had grown noisier. Some of the women did not look quite so immaculate or well-groomed, now. Here, one had torn a length of chiffon from her gown and left it dragging; there, one went heedless of untidy hair. And there were men with wilted collars and ties awry. The flowers, too, had begun to droop.

As Katherine and Garry joined the dancers, Napoleon took up a position near the dance floor, and studied the gyrating couples with a casual eye that missed nothing.

Although he had as yet no definite suspicions against any of Da Costa's quondam

associates, he knew that the sight of a face—or a glance swiftly averted—would presently crystallize various unrelated recollections floating in his mind, now, into a connected chain; and that this chain would lead him inevitably to the murderer.

All this may make Napoleon appear to be a clear-thinking individual with more than an average allotment of intelligence; but such was not the case. He was merely a very shrewd Italian of the peasant class, who had lived by his wits all his life; and the peasant class, living close to the earth, is apt to have instinctive sense strongly developed. Napoleon did not reason things out—not as a general thing, that is. He *felt* things! He exercised a faculty in warfare similar to the faculty certain animals employ.

Very few deep-thinking men have this faculty. It is not ordinarily part of the masculine make-up. Animals have it, and women. And when women have it, we call it intuition. By some means that is never clear to the logical mind, a woman will suddenly, startlingly arrive at the solution of a problem, and will be right, though she cannot support her decision by arguments or proofs. Napoleon had this same ability—at least to some small degree. And so he felt that if he just watched and waited, *something* would betray the guilty man to him, *if he was in the room*.

It was not that Napoleon relied upon miracles! He knew enough of Da Costa's life and Da Costa's friends to know just *which* particular individuals in that assembly to study.

Moffat Fielding passed him, dancing with Joan. He scrutinized them both with narrowed eyes. Fielding he knew as one of Da Costa's former intimates—a youth for whom Da Costa had often obtained drugs. But Napoleon eliminated Fielding.

Joan he knew as one of Da Costa's cast-off mistresses. But he eliminated Joan.

George Milburne went by with Mable. He studied them a long time dubiously, feeling in Milburne a potential "killer." But eventually he dismissed him from his mind. Milburne's manner was not the manner of a man who had guilt on his soul.

It does not require a conscience to make guilt a burden hard to bear unflinchingly. It requires only a definite knowledge of the possible consequences.

You kill, knowing that you are committing a crime which is punishable by your own death if you are found out! This knowledge colors your future thoughts, your future movements, your future actions. You cannot prevent it! You are alert! You are on guard! You are looking for suspicion to be directed upon you! You are listening for the advancing footsteps of the pursuers! You are waiting—everlastingly *waiting*—to be caught! This shows in your eyes—in the poise of your head—in the way you hold your hands.

Napoleon, who had killed in his day, and had helped to trap others who had killed, knew these things well. So he continued his search. Here were these people locked in these rooms! Escape was impossible! The murderer knew that! He knew, likewise, that there was a dead man on the floor above with a knife wound in his throat. It was a race between discovery of that body and the opening of the doors. He must be counting the minutes! You cannot sit counting the minutes and remain calm while your life hangs in the balance! You cannot dance and remain indifferent. Outwardly you may retain an appearance of serenity. But the *signs* will be there for those who can to read.

Old Mrs. Chipman jounced by, more danced against than dancing. A sleek-haired blond young man from one of the English theatrical companies did his best to guide her hazardous course. Once Da Costa had so guided her. Indeed, it had been Da Costa who had first taught her to dance. But Napoleon wasted no time upon Mrs. Chipman or her latest consort. At the most, Da Costa had got out of her only a few occasional thousands in cash and some presents of jewelry. There was nothing there to furnish motive for a murder—no one inclined to commit the murder even if there had been a motive. Mr. Chipman did not care in the least with whom his wife amused herself, nor how much money she spent on her dancing partners. He could afford whatever she wanted, and he

was still fond of her, in spite of her foolishness. After all, years of living together does create a kind of bond. So Mrs. Chipman went ricocheting gayly on her way.

Katherine caught his eye next. She floated—in Garry's arms—like a thing of thistledown swept on by a breeze. And as she danced she gazed off into space, wistfully—with dreaming eyes and red lips that drooped at the corners. She was thinking how safe she felt, with his arms about her, and his lips whispering words of comfort and encouragement against her shining hair. She had known him for years, and yet had never really known him until to-night—certainly had never appreciated him before. And the hot color flamed in her cheeks as she recalled her folly over Da Costa, and the fact that Garry knew of it! It seemed incredible, now, that she had ever even fancied herself caring for the dancer—that she had, even for a mad instant, hesitated between Garry and him. It had been a kind of enchantment, she felt. It must have been. And she trembled for her future, so long as she was free to fall a prey to others of his ilk. She clung to Garry at the thought—clung close—almost desperately, reassuring herself with the feel of him there. And he smiled down at her confidently, his heart beating fast. To hold her close like this was to him his dreams come true; for he had loved her all his life—since first he had seen her, a long-legged girl in a middy blouse, with curls to her elbows. There had been no bobbed heads then. He felt as though all that they had gone through—and all that there was yet to face—was as nothing if out of it was born that lasting love between them for which he had always hoped. There are some men that love lightly and often, and some men that love only once. Garry was one of these. And Napoleon, watching them, knew it, and realized that this man would kill for this woman if the need arose. But though he looked anxious—concerned—he had not the mien of a guilty man nor yet that of a hero.

There was no one else on the dance floor that Napoleon connected with Da Costa. And he was disturbed, for a moment only. Then he bethought him of the others, seat

ed off among the scattered tables, and he began slowly to traverse the room, his eyes darting sharply left and right.

He noted Mrs. Milburne and passed her by. He noted Everton Bancroft, from whom Da Costa had stolen Joan Olcott; but he was leaning across the table, gazing into the eyes of a younger beauty, and in his dull, drink-dimmed eyes, and on his fat, smug face there was no sign of guilt.

He went on slowly—meeting with no success until he came to the little niche screened with palms, where Silvers sat facing Bartlett—and as Napoleon's eyes fell upon Bartlett, he stopped suddenly where he was and stood staring, his jaw dropped, his nostrils quivering.

Bartlett was very pale, and was lounging there calmly, but with an enforced calm that hid a secret uneasiness. His ears listened strainedly. In his eyes was a hunted, nervous look.

Here were the signs he had been seeking. And the significant fact was that here was a man in whom the signs might easily be weighty with meaning, for Napoleon knew that Bartlett had known Tony Costello in San Francisco! Napoleon knew just how much Bartlett had done for Tony, and just how badly Tony had treated Bartlett. Not that he sympathized with Bartlett for the way Tony had mistreated him. He merely knew the facts and found in them a motive. And he knew Bartlett and felt in him the courage and strength of a man who might easily reap his vengeance unaided.

He stood motionless—with palpitating heart—wondering if Bartlett would remember him. True, he had been only a bus boy on the Barbary Coast when Tony had first danced there; but men who lived by their wits, as Bartlett always had, usually had an uncanny memory for faces.

As Napoleon hesitated, pondering his next move, Silvers turned round and espied him.

"Here, bring me a glass of that Martel brandy, 1815," he called.

Napoleon bowed and backed off, an unholo joy glowing warm in his breast. He knew that Silvers did not drink. He guessed that the brandy was intended for Bartlett. And he had a tiny white powder

in his wallet that would be tasteless in the brandy, and that would pay Da Costa's debt to Bartlett more quietly than a stiletto wound, but just as effectively.

Napoleon had been carrying the powder for a long time, against just such an emergency as this!

CHAPTER XXV.

THE INNOCENT AND THE GUILTY.

SILVERS had felt some alarm upon rejoining Bartlett, and finding him crouched down in his chair, with vague eyes and a colorless face; but Bartlett had met all of his inquiries with shrugs of unconcern, and it was not until Silvers suggested the Martel brandy that Bartlett displayed any interest whatever. He was fond of old brandy—indeed, in regard to liquors, he had the discriminating taste of a connoisseur, and "Martel, 1815," tempted his palate beyond endurance. Besides, there was the chance that the fiery stuff might lend him strength. It was stimulating and sustaining, always. So he smiled and yielded when Silvers proffered it.

The brandy ordered, Silvers abandoned the subject of Bartlett's health, observing that he did not like to dwell upon it, and attempted to catch Bartlett's interest by returning to the matter of the murder again. It was uppermost in his mind, anyway, and he thought it might keep Bartlett's mind off his own condition. It did! He noted that at once, with satisfaction. He recognized the light of quickening interest in Bartlett's eyes as soon as he began to speak.

"Well," he said, "it looks as if we've found the woman—the one who did Da Costa, I mean!"

"Yes?" prompted Bartlett.

"Got hold of some letters that 'll settle it, I think. Funny how a woman can look as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, and still have hell-let-loose inside her?"

"Some—fast woman?" asked Bartlett.

"No—that's the strangest part of it. One of the wealthiest girls in town—a society girl!"

"Well," said Bartlett, "I guess it doesn't

make much difference what class they're born into—it's what's *inside* 'em will count in the end." And then he added with apparent irrelevance: "She'll be able to exert influence and wealth in her behalf, anyway!"

"It 'll be a nine days' wonder when it gets out," said Silvers. "Front-page stuff—and it 'll ruin me here! This has been an unlucky night for me, all right—first losing my biggest asset—Da Costa—and then getting into a mess like this on my opening night here!"

"I've got a little put by," said Bartlett contritely, "if you get in over your head."

"Oh, I've got a little put by myself; thanks just the same," Silvers assured him with a wink. "But I don't mean to cut into that if I can help it—not in times like these! If I can only handle this affair right, I might have my losses taken care of for me; but it takes tact! You won't mind if I leave you again, will you? I got to keep my mind on this affair until it's settled!"

"That's all right! I kind of like to sit here quietly by myself," Bartlett assured him, "and just look on!"

"Fine!" cried Silvers, nodding. "You just make yourself comfortable, and if you can't get anything you want, let me know!"

He was off again. Bartlett gazed after his squat figure reflectively.

"*Make yourself comfortable!*" There was something almost ludicrous in that parting injunction! As though he could possibly make himself comfortable *there!* Sitting stiffly upright when he ought to be bandaged and in bed. And sitting there, under the constant strain of their investigation—fearing lest at any minute they find his trail—fearing lest the napkin slip down at an unguarded moment and the blood stain be revealed—fearing lest his paltry strength give out before he had succeeded in dragging his weary body home to safety.

Make himself comfortable! *Da Costa* was more comfortable, he thought, lying at ease up there under his skimpy white covering. *He* feared nothing! He dreaded nothing. He suffered nothing. The great silence had engulfed him.

And suddenly Bartlett got an odd idea! He wondered if it might not have been wiser to let *Da Costa* murder *him!* Surely he would have been happier—out there in the hereafter—knowing that his enemy was here, fearing, dreading, suffering. And then—if there was a future life—it would have been *Da Costa* who would have had to face his judges and exonerate himself.

Bartlett had never thought about the future life. He scorned himself now for thinking of such rubbish, and told himself that his loss of blood had muddled his brain—that his weakness was responsible. It had given him fancies.

The idea of judgment, and a hell in which spirits burned eternally, and a heaven where harps were played! No, he really could not credit those things! Nor yet the strange life of which Conan Doyle and others were telling. Let the subject be! He would know in time—and take his medicine like a man, whatever it might be.

Napoleon arrived—bearing a single glass of brandy on a silver tray. It was a small glass, filled almost to the brim with a burnished brown-gold liquor, crystal clear. The white powder that he had carefully stirred into it had dissolved perfectly, leaving no trace. It was tasteless, too, and without odor. The *bouquet* of the brandy was unaffected. But the effect of the brandy was tremendously reinforced. Death lurked now in its golden drops.

Above the tray Napoleon's face smiled ingenuously like a child's. He set his precious burden down.

"Brandy," he said, and stood aside, waiting.

"Thanks," said Bartlett. To him Napoleon was just a waiter like other waiters. He did not suspect him. He did not even closely observe him. He reached out and took the brandy glass in his fingers—studied the color with a connoisseur's pleased glance; sniffed the *bouquet*.

And his mind—easily influenced by passing impressions, now, because of his weakness—went drifting back through the years to a girl that he had known and loved once when he was young—a fresh, young thing with cheeks like spring blossoms and dancing brown eyes. The brandy recalled her

because he had been particularly fond of the old French brandy that her mother had, and he had made that his excuse for going often to the inn. Her mother ran the inn, and the little Nichette served. She wore the wooden shoes of the peasant, and a very crisp white cap; and Bartlett's grandeur had impressed her tremendously. He had made a "killing" on the ponies, and had decided to see Europe; and he had made another killing at Monte Carlo, and was spending money like a king. No one else spends money like a king, because no one else comes by it so easily! And Bartlett, who had always made capital of other people's weaknesses, knew how to appeal to Nichette. He had told her stories of the world beyond Brittany—stirring her imagination. He had given her a string of shining beads for her white throat; a glittering comb for her bright hair. And she had given him her foolish little heart in exchange for these baubles. He remembered her white arms round his neck—her dancing eyes that could so swiftly fill with tears—her voice.

Napoleon, waiting impatiently to remove the brandy glass when Bartlett had drunk from it, and wash it himself lest some trace of the white powder linger, fretted at the delay.

Why did he not drink?

Did he suspect?

Did some instinct warn him of danger?

His dark eyes studied Bartlett critically: but Bartlett, unaware, dreamed on. He had forgotten the brandy, as one forgets the messenger that brings glad tidings. But he was still fingering the glass, absently, and his eyes rested upon it as a crystal gazer's rests upon his crystal. Napoleon waited for a moment, eager for the reverie to be ended and his vengeance accomplished. But still Bartlett did not drink. And then Charlie passed by, summoning the loitering Napoleon with a commanding wave of the hand. Napoleon dared not disobey Charlie, nor dared he court suspicion of his actions by lingering in Bartlett's vicinity, though he was anxious to reclaim the brandy glass when it was emptied, in order to cleanse it thoroughly himself before it fell into any one else's hands. However, there was noth-

ing for it but to go now and return as soon as possible. But he was determined not to go before putting the spur to Bartlett. Advancing quite near, he leaned down to arouse the dreamer, and said in a voice grimly significant:

"Good night, Mr. Bartlett!"

Then he turned and vanished swiftly through the palms, leaving Bartlett staring after him. Bartlett was vaguely aware that there had been something subtly menacing in the waiter's mien, but he was at a loss to account for it. And as he pondered the matter, he concluded that he had imagined the menace—that he had been aroused so suddenly from his musings that he had not seen nor heard clearly.

He lifted the brandy glass to his lips with a little sigh of satisfaction; but he did not drink, for before his lips had touched the glass he was interrupted. Suddenly a girl broke through the screen of palms that shut off that niche from the rest of the supper rooms, and leaning heavily upon his table for support, stood white and panting. It was Katherine.

She had been dancing with Nettleton again, and his love making, which had been growing more insistent as time passed, had suddenly become unendurable. *Everything* had suddenly become unendurable, and she had broken away from him, to seek covert, like some helpless little animal who is being hunted and pressed too close.

For an instant she stood there, silent, white, trembling, breathing hard; her eyes gazed out darkly, appealingly. Then, gradually, she recovered control, and murmured:

"I'm so sorry to burst in upon you like this! But I didn't know any one was here! I was running away!"

"That's quite all right," said Bartlett. With a tremendous effort he rose, and bowed gallantly. "Won't you sit down until you feel better?"

She looked at him—this pale, burned-out looking old man in his courtly attire of other days—and graciously nodded. There was something quite pathetic about him, she thought.

"Thank you. You are very kind," she said, sinking into the chair opposite him.

He resumed his seat, then, with a little sigh!

To Bartlett this was the beginning of another charming adventure. His life had been rather full of charming adventures—and some that were not quite so charming—but one forgets unpleasant things easily. He felt that luck was still with him—that this lovely young thing should have come at just this time—to cheer the weary time of waiting before he could be free to go. He saw in her coming an omen—a fortunate omen. And being superstitious—as all gamblers are—he felt suddenly very gay.

"You are more than welcome," he said. "Please stay as long as you like. It is as quiet here as anywhere in this—this bedlam. And if you feel inclined to talk, I feel more than inclined to listen. I am alone, you see, and a little lonely!"

She thought him quite charming, as many women before her had; so simple and quaint and old-fashioned—like a ghost out of some dead long ago. And that intangling something about him that suggested mystery—tragedy—that appealed to her strongly.

"Still," she said slowly, "it must be very interesting to sit here and look on at all this, with the perspective your years give you! You have seen so many changes come in the world, and you can make comparisons."

"Yes," he admitted, nodding. "Things are different than they used to be—on the surface at any rate. I mean the manifestations are different. But underneath, of course, nothing ever changes. The same things are fundamentally true to-day that were true yesterday—and a thousand years ago. These dances! One danced differently years ago, but the same impulse made one dance—the same spirit was in it! Our music was different, too, but it appealed to our more sentimental generation as your jazz music appeals to you. And these very modern people—why, they are all loving and hating and fighting and competing and sacrificing themselves and each other—and dreaming and dying and *living* as we did in our day—as *Columbus* did in his day—as *Adam* did in *his* day."

"How weary God must be," said Kath-

erine, "looking on at it all—over and over and over—always the same."

"I don't know," said Bartlett. "It must be wonderfully interesting to see it work out. Like a game of chess, in which the figures move themselves. There are only certain moves they can make in every situation; but the situations they *get into* are quite their own affairs. You and I, for instance. We did not deliberately plan this meeting. And yet whatever we have done up to this moment has made this meeting happen. Why?"

"I don't know," said Katherine. "Do you think it is for some purpose?"

"I think everything happens for some purpose," said Bartlett, "though we often cannot fathom what the purpose is."

She was silent, thoughtful; and Bartlett's fingers toyed idly with the brandy glass.

"It's a little frightening," she said at last, "to think that every lightest thing one does has some bearing on all the future things that are to happen. I don't know that I like your theory, exactly."

"Perhaps not! One never likes responsibility," smiled Bartlett. "But that would be the only logical way. Wouldn't it?"

"I dare say," she agreed. And she sighed. "How seriously we are talking—and how strange to be doing it in a place like this!" she cried, and added swiftly, impulsively, "and what a relief it is!"

He nodded.

"If you will pardon my saying it, it must be—to you," he said. "You are not really the sort of girl who would care for this, I think!"

"But I always have cared for it—until to-night!" she replied. "To-night, somehow, it seems different! It's as if I were seeing it for the first time!"

"But that is quite a common experience," he assured her. "We walk along a certain street every day for years without particularly observing the buildings until something calls our attention to one of them—and suddenly we find ourselves regarding it as though for the first time! Something has evidently called your attention to all this to-night, or you might have gone on thinking you liked it—for years!"

"Yes," she said. And then she went on

slowly, considering him interestedly: "You don't belong here, either, you know! You are as out of place as I am."

"I don't belong anywhere, much, my dear," he answered. "At least—I have never quite found out where I *do* belong! I have been drifting about for years—trying to figure it out. You see, so many kinds of people are mixed up inside me! One part of me belongs one place and one part belongs somewhere else. And these various elements are always at war among themselves. I am about one-tenth artist and one-tenth explorer, and one-tenth Christian and one-tenth pagan, and two-tenths sentimentalist, and two-tenths cynic, and the rest gambler. You can imagine what a task it must be to keep all of those strange boarders living together in one boarding house."

"Yes, but all of us have the same problem to solve. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps. More or less. That's what makes us interesting to one another, I suppose! If we were all consistent, and could be relied upon to do a certain thing in a given situation, we'd bore one another a lot, wouldn't we? As it is, we're mostly all mysteries—even to ourselves!"

She nodded.

"I am to myself, I know. I startle myself at times—and shock myself—and horrify myself. And sometimes I'm proud of myself. But not as often as I'd like to be. Outside things influence one, don't you think? Opportunity makes heroes!"

"Yes, but according to my theory, the hero has been working *toward* that opportunity for years. One thing leads to another, and the way you acquit yourself in *one* situation determines the nature of the *next* one. Cause and effect, you see. The murderer does not literally hang himself, but when he takes life he sets in motion the machinery that in the end inevitably hangs him!"

"Inevitably?" she repeated curiously.

"Perhaps I should have said 'inevitably wrecks him'! Some escape hanging, but I think none escapes punishment." He smiled. "That," he said, "was the sage in me talking, you see. But I assure you

that if put to the test, the fool in me would kill his man, just the same, undeterred by the sage's knowledge."

"Then," said Katherine, "that is because the governing part of you has never been strong enough to control the various other elements. One must be master of these contrasted parts of one! It is good to be a sentimentalist at times—an artist at times—a cynic at times—a sage at times—and at times, even a fool! But one must be strong enough to give way or hold back as one wills. One must not let any side of one grow stronger than one's *will*!"

"How wise you are," he smiled.

"I always am," smiled Katherine, "when I have just completed some folly."

He studied her.

"Odd," he said, "that we should be sitting here so companionably—like old, old friends—understanding each other. And yet—you so near the beginning of life, and I so near the end of it!"

Her eyes grew darker, her color faded.

"Who knows about life?" she said. "I may be nearer the end than you!"

"Not likely," he said, thinking of the wound in his side—and the dead man upstairs—and the imminence of the police. And then he added, with a defiant grin, "Not that I mind in the least!"

She looked at him, wondering if he could mind as little as he seemed to.

"I mind!" she admitted. "I am terribly afraid of dying. I don't know how any one can face it—endure it! Of course there is nothing else one *can* do but go through with it when one's time comes. But not to know what is going to happen! To go out alone, into *nothingness*! It frightens me!" She leaned there upon the table opposite him, white, shaken, with her hands clenched, fighting for breath. It had been a hard night. Bartlett saw that she was on the verge of collapse, and leaning forward, he laid one hand upon hers and lifted the glass of brandy in the other. He held it out toward her, feeling that her need for it was greater far than his.

"Here! Drink this!" he murmured gently.

And submissively Katherine drank it.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



Plowing Time

By LOUISE TOWNSEND NICHOLL

IT was plowing time along the west shore of the Hudson—time of earth turned up again in fields beyond that stretch of tracks where the expresses go very fast and the accommodations very slow, carrying their country passengers from little town to little near-by town, almost from farm to farm the country seasons through. There was no express stop near; if a farmer—or a farmer's wife—should ever want suddenly to make a swift escape from well-known things, he couldn't. His train would still go halting, halting, as if from habit, at the little stations where he had always gotten off before. Only a mile at a time, a mile at a time, would that home railroad let him go; spun out for a little way, and then another little way, like a spider's web, and just as easy to be broken, would his journey be.

The car was warmer than it needed to be for the half-cool, half-warm, early April day which lay, sunning, brown and blue and faintly green outside. Those passengers who had been coming for two hours or so, through the still, living placidity of that countryside at noon, were growing

drowsy, hypnotized, with the silence of the car, the warmth of April sun, made hotter by the window glass.

The pullings-in to stations, the leisurely pullings-out, the gentle stirrings of the one or two who got off or got on, the lazy interchange of conductor and station masters grew rhythmic. Now it was early afternoon—that warm and quiet time. This ride might last forever—it was the type and symbol of all country trains, running in drowsiness through the quiet land—the land of utter peace where the earth was being turned again, as had been done so many, many springs, in fields.

The eternity of the land, the unceasing quiet movement of its life were here.

There were several middle-aged women, comfortable, placid, neighborly, farmers' wives of many years' standing, among those who came and went. They had won through to this place where, even in plowing time, their children grown, and the noonday dinner over, they could take an afternoon now and then for generous visiting, scant shopping. One of them had a

small basket covered with a napkin—jelly or soup or buttermilk for some one sick. There was something of rich content about these women, worn and shapeless though they were, as if they had taken to themselves that unimaginative motherness and kindness which is the earth's now that her travail and her wistfulness are done. There were, sitting heavily together, drummers with their great, square, nonconformist satchels. Up in the front were two country lawyers, from whom floated now and then a legal term. They were idly, sleepily, intermittently speaking of a recent case. There were, like a clump of late or early flowers in a garden brown and lonely but for them, a white-skinned, red-haired, mature country girl with two little children in her arms, and beside her another girl, smaller and less beautiful than she, but better dressed, all huddled in one seat. And there were the few who had come through, for obscure and unimaginable reasons, on a local train.

To catch so slow a train it did not seem that any one would have to hurry; but suddenly, noisily, wildly one did come hurrying; suddenly from the newness of the spring and the oldness of its coming, and into the drowsy timelessness and whispering stillness of that car the immediate present, active, angry, uncomplimentary made swift invasion. And every person in the car looked up, blinking, as from a daze—every person except the girl with red hair and the girl with her. For them, since they had gotten on a few stations back, unnoticed particularly by any one, there had been no daze, no drowsiness, no sense of time as being any other day than this. And for the swift and furious invasion, no matter how much they had tried to think the opposite, they were not altogether unprepared. Straight, silent, unwinking, defiant, holding the children tight, the red-haired girl awaited the attack, and watched the man lunge down the aisle to her.

The flying automobile, a more or less dilapidated flivver, which reached that little station just as the train was pulling out, was the first fast-moving thing the windows of the train had shown. It swerved and slowed, and the man hurled himself out and

at the train, pulling himself up easily onto the front platform of the car. He was young and middle-sized and not over comely, except for his strength and his intent, unconscious breathlessness. He was in overalls, and the blue shirt turned in on his brown chest made him match the April sky and fields in color. He was so hot that his hatless, roughened hair was damp about his temples.

No one had known before how hot a day it was. But he was also terrible, as angry people are, and the whole car went out flowing in sympathy to the girl. Odd they had not noticed her before—so strikingly different and brave and beautiful she looked now to their sudden, concentrated gaze, her face white as a summer clod above the old dark winter coat and beneath the warped, black straw sailor hat which was pinned onto the flaming, curling hair just anyhow. In her left arm she had the smallest child—a baby—and her right was about the little boy, three years old or so. The other girl, her backer in the fight, her eyes round with horror and fright, sat protectively between her and the aisle.

He shook his fist as he came thundering down the aisle.

"Get off this train!" he shouted. "Get off this train right now. Where do you think you're going—stealing my money and my children?"

"They're *my* children—and I ain't goin' to get off this train. I'm *through*," said the red-haired girl, stony, defiant, tight-lipped.

And suddenly the smoldering flame was out of the hold and up through the hatches, for all the world to see. How would it end? What could be saved? Suddenly the things which had been secret and unsaid were shouted loudly, in a railroad train, on a peaceful, sultry April afternoon. How strange that these two should have chosen this setting for their scene; should have come so far and picked the slumbering, torpid, slow-moving train to be their brief, surprising battlefield! Drama moving through the countryside on the afternoon "down-train."

The audience came in more closely, standing in the aisle, leaning forward in

their seats. The conductor and the trainman came down the car from opposite ends, curious, tolerant, only mildly worried. They had been on that train so many, many years! The shouting and confusion grew unintelligible, the angry, excited shouting of the man; the stony, defiant, sulky answers of the girl; the occasional shrill protests and comments of the other girl, who seemed now to be really rather in the way; the murmurings of the other passengers; the important interruptions of one of the lawyers, who kept assuring her that her husband would not be allowed to take the children away from her; the gruff, kindly directions of the old conductor.

The girl sat large, immovable, a lovely, miserable stone, a red-haired, white-skinned sphinx. What chance had the angry, shouting, damp-haired boy against her? And yet in him there was some strain of power, some strong thing—affection, cruelty, tenacity, instinct, heredity, environment, who knows what—that would go on, that would not stop. What chance had the defiant, lovely, sulky woman, so hurt and proud and fierce, with her children clinging to her neck and arms and skirt, against him? What chance had either of them against the children, who had been crying from the first in loud and pitifully frightened whimpers?

"Stop the train!" shouted the man to the conductor. "Stop the train. She took two hundred and fifty dollars of my money."

"Well, you never gave me any to spend," she answered.

It was to him only that she spoke—she would have endured torture rather than tell her story to any of these people of whose presence she was so bitterly conscious. That he could say this thing to a conductor! And yet it was for him as if the conductor was not there.

Suddenly he leaned over and took the baby from her arms, holding the wailing little creature so that its clothes were all up around it in a bunch. It clutched wildly at its mother's warped, black sailor hat as it went, and with her arms both out to try to get the baby back, she did not straighten it. That poor black hat, warped and crooked and old!

If she had had a new hat lately would she have been so wildly resentful, so stubbornly cold; would she have hated him so?

He started running down the aisle, holding the baby, and the two women started after him, the little boy clinging to his mother's hand. On the platform it began all over again, the conductor and trainman keeping them from falling off, and repeating that the train could not be stopped until a station came. The lawyer kept reassuring the girl, who seemed, however, very little interested in what he said.

Then, all of a sudden, the worst was over. In some mysterious way they were back in the car, the other girl next to the window this time, and the boy half-sitting on the arm of his wife's seat, leaning over her. His anger was gone, but the terrible earnestness and intentness and unconsciousness of his surroundings had endured with a strange, almost awe-inspiring persistency. The red-haired girl still sat rigid, but there was some change, intangible and slight, in her. She was still defiant and sulky, but she was no longer a sphinx; she was a woman now—a girl—and pretty well worn out. There was a strange pitiable tiredness about the man, too, as if the struggle had been going on for hours instead of crowded minutes. He was talking more softly now, and the audience had somewhat withdrawn. Suddenly his voice rang out clearly, in determination and appeal: "Katherine, I *will* not leave these children."

And she did not answer, but held them to her, looking up at him. It had come to that, then—to the realization that unless she went back, one of them *must* "leave these children." And how could that be?

He repeated it, in an unconsciousness of every one except his wife, so deep, so honest, that even the hovering lawyer drew away, women who had drawn together to watch could not meet each other's eyes, and the old conductor, muttering something to himself, walked off toward the door. There was a cadence and a beauty to the words, so that they sounded like a vow; so that the cadenced, rhythmic, almost terrifying phrase sounded as familiar as if this were a scriptural repetition—something which men had always said at certain times.

The children had grown quieter, quick as only little children are to tell a change of mood. Then, as if a spell were broken, as if the anger and the stress and the high intensity had suddenly fallen away from him, he said, quite naturally, and with a start of recollection and surprise:

"Katherine, you must come now—I left my horses in the field."

The whole car heard, and there was a little rustle of relief and yet of consternation. He had left his horses in the field! And their minds went back, remembering, and piecing out the tale. The machine he had jumped out of after his chase? How about that? Somebody else's, probably. And how had he found that she had gone? Had he gone in to dinner which was not there? Had some one run to him? How had it been? No one aboard this train would ever know except those two. He had left his horses in the field! A look of utter weariness, of indifference, of something almost like relief, came over Katherine's face. What chance had they against the house, the land, the horses they had left, against the earth itself—they who were servants of the seasons, bound to the slow wheel of the year?

The train was slowing up—was it only between two stations, quite close together, that they had come? And they were getting out, the father holding the baby, with its best clothes still rumpled up and bunched. Katherine went reluctantly, and yet without a protest. Ignominiously the friend trailed after them. The swift escape, the brilliant coup, in which she was to play so large, protective, and belligerent a part, had failed. And Katherine seemed almost to have forgotten that she was there.

The passengers, quiet now, watched the

little procession drag itself across the cinders in front of the station—they watched Katherine, particularly—beautiful Katherine with the red hair and the warpy hat. How would it have been for her if she had gone on? Would she ever again try to get away? Had she really hoped a little that he would come? Would he understand better now how it had been for her? Would she have a new hat soon?

The slow train moved on. The passengers settled back and the drowse sank gradually again upon them. Only the lawyer must make comment to his companion. He made it cheerily, as if this were a little thing, an ordinary thing, a rather amusing thing—one to be treated indulgently, and as if he himself were a connoisseur in the art of delicate adjustments. If it had been he himself who had brought things to this happy settlement he could not have been more complacent—and very likely he thought it was.

"They'll be all right," he said, a little loudly, through the settling hush. "Just some little spat started 'em off, I suppose."

The others were very still. The woman with the napkin-covered basket was staring thoughtfully out of the window, something between a decorous horror and a startled understanding—was it something resembling recollection on her face? Could there have been for her, as well, in some distant other spring, an April afternoon?

It had been only a little while—ten or fifteen minutes at the most. It was still early afternoon that the slow down-train was passing through. Outside were still brown fields, blue sky, and faintest April green over the land—the old, old land to which no changes but the recurrent and unchanging seasons ever come.

MATTER OF FACT

SENTIMENTAL tommyrot

Never goes with me:

"Broken hearts" are seldom what

They're cracked up to be!

Harold Seton.



The Fire People

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "The Golden Atom," etc.

CHAPTER XXIV (*continued*).

THE WATER CITY.

THE men around the table were now all on their feet. One of them picked up a huge metal goblet and flung it at Mercer's head. The last remaining bit of reason Mercer had left fled from him. Without thought of what he was about, he raised the metal cylinder; his thumb found the little button and pressed it hard; he waved the cylinder back and forth before him.

It was over in an instant. Mercer relaxed his pressure on the button and staggered back. He was sick and faint from what he had seen—with the realization of what he had done. Flames were rising all about him. The room was full of smoke. He held his breath, finding his way back some-

how to the stairway, with the agonized screams of the men ringing in his ears. He caught a glimpse of Anina's white face as she stood there where he had left her.

"Good God, Anina! Go back! Go back! I'm coming!"

He tripped near the top of the stairs and fell in a heap onto the platform below, but he still held the cylinder clutched tightly in his hand.

Anina groped her way down to him. He gripped her by the arm. He was trembling like a leaf. The crackling of the burning house above came down to him; the cries of the men were stilled.

"Come, Anina," he half whispered. "Hurry—let's get away, anywhere. Home—out of this cursed city."

Lua was still in the boat. Her calm, steady glance brought Mercer back to his

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senses. They shoved the boat out from under the house, and in a moment more were heading back through the city. The building they had left was now a mass of flames, with a great cloud of smoke rolling up from it. A woman stood on the front platform an instant, and then, screaming, flung herself into the water.

The city was in commotion. Faces appeared at windows; girls flew up and gathered in a frightened flock, circling about the burning building; boats miraculously appeared from everywhere. Lua was steering their boat on its tortuous way between the houses. She put the boat nearly to full speed, and as they swept past a house nearly collided with a punt that was crossing behind it.

Mercer's nerves were still shaken. He handed Anina the light-ray cylinder.

"Here—take it, Anina. I don't want the cursed thing. Shoot it up into the air. Somebody might try and stop us. That'll scare them. Careful you don't hit anything!"

Anina played the light about in the air for a time, but soon there were so many girls flying about she had to shut it off. A few minutes more and they had passed the last of the houses, swept around the bend in the river, and left the frightened city out of sight behind them.

They had left the river and, following close along shore, headed for the bayous that led up to the Great City. The storm had now entirely passed, leaving the daylight unusually bright and a fresh coolness in the air. The sea was still rough, although not alarmingly so, and the boat made comparatively slow progress. It was two hours or more—to Mercer it seemed a whole day—before they were nearing the bayous. Anina was sitting by his side in the center of the boat. Lua was steering.

"You hungry, Ollie?" the girl asked, smiling.

Mercer shook his head. He had forgotten they had intended to eat in the Water City.

"I very hungry. Soon we—"

She stopped abruptly, staring up into the sky ahead of them.

Mercer followed her glance. A little

black blob showed against the gray; off to one side two other smaller black dots appeared.

"What's that?" cried Mercer, alarmed.

They watched a few moments in silence. Then Mercer took the cylinder and flashed its light into the air.

"If it's anybody connected with Tao, that 'll show they'd better keep away," he explained grimly.

Anina smiled. "Tao people cannot fly, Ollie."

A few moments more and they saw what it was. And within ten minutes they had landed at the mouth of one of the bayous, and Miela and I were with them.

CHAPTER XXV.

PREPARATIONS FOR WAR.

THE months that followed were the busiest, I think, of my life. I began by a complete reorganization of this government of which I found myself the head. For the doddering old councilors of the late king I substituted men whom I selected from among those of the city's prominent business men who cared to serve.

The personnel of the police force I allowed to remain, for I soon saw they were inclined to act very differently under me than under my predecessor. The various other officials of this somewhat vague organization I subjected to a thorough weeding out.

The net result was chaos for a time, but, far more quickly than I had anticipated, I had things running again. I made no radical changes except in personnel. I attempted to do nothing that was outside the then existing laws, and no new laws were passed. But from the very first I made it clear that I was not one to be trifled with.

Within a few days after I was put into power I interviewed Fuero and his scientific confrères. I found them a body of grave men who represented the highest type of the nation. They made it plain to me at once that they would not concern themselves in any way with government affairs.

Two years before they had recognized Tao's menace, and had been preparing for it by the manufacture of large quantities of war material which, in case of extreme necessity, they would turn over to the government. This armament, as Miela had told me, they guarded themselves, not trusting it even to their workmen.

The scientific men, I understood now, were among the richest in the nation, owing to the widespread use of their industrial appliances. It was only a portion of this wealth that they were expending in the manufacture of armament.

I demanded the release to me of this war material. I explained them my plans, and told them in detail of Tao's visit to earth. They held several conferences over a period of two or three days, but in the end I got what I asked for.

So much for affairs in the Great City. I recognized during these days the possibility of an armed invasion from the Twilight Country. I was better prepared to meet it now, should it come, and I at once took steps to be warned as far in advance as possible. To this end I had girls patrolling the Narrow Sea, not only on our shore, but over in the Twilight Country as well; and I was satisfied that if Tao made any move we would be notified at once. Simultaneously with all this, we devoted ourselves to the unification of the nation, for in very truth it seemed about to disintegrate. Here it was that the girls were of the greatest assistance.

We organized them into an army which consisted of fifty squads of ten girls each, with a leader for each squad. All of these girls were armed with the light-ray cylinders. With this "flying army" Mercer and I made a tour of the Light Country cities. We wasted no time with formalities, but rounded up Tao's men wherever we could find them, and transported them uncereemoniously back to the Twilight Country shore.

In two or three of the cities—the Water City particularly—there was a show of rebellion among the people; but our light-rays cowed them instantly, and in no instance did we have to kill or injure any one. Through Miela I made speeches every-

where. It was not my wish to hold the country in sullen subjection, and to that end I appealed to their patriotism in this coming war against Tao and the Twilight People. This aspect of the matter met with ready response, and everywhere our meetings ended in enthusiastic acclaim.

We started now to raise an army of young men, which we proposed to transport across the Narrow Sea for land operations in the Twilight Country. Before a week had passed I saw, by the response that came from my various proclamations, that conscription would be unnecessary. With this tangible evidence of the coming war the patriotism of the people grew by leaps and bounds. The fact that the girls of the Great City were not only in favor of it, but were actually already in service—a thing unprecedented in the history of the nation—brought the sympathies of all the women with us strongly.

Through the governors of each city I raised a separate army of young men, officered by the older men, most of whom had taken part in past fighting. Each of these little armies, as yet without arms, was drilled and held in readiness for orders from the Great City.

I had, during all this time, selected as many able men as possible from among the Great City's population, and given them over to Fuero and his associates for training in the use of the light-ray rockets, the larger projectors, protective measures against the ray, and many other appliances which I understood only vaguely myself.

It was after our return from the tour of the different cities, and before the recruiting of the young men was fairly under way, when like a bombshell came the news from our flying patrol that a fleet of armed boats was coming down the river from the Lone City. The attack from Tao was at hand, and our preparations were still far from complete. We had our army of girls in active operation, and that was all. Tao's boats would reach the Light Country shore in a few hours. There was no time for anything but the hastiest of preparations. We decided then to call the army of girls and meet the boats in the Narrow Sea, turning them back if possible.

I have now to explain the method of defense against the light-ray. In theory I only vaguely understood it. In practice it was simple and, like most defenses, only partially effective.

Bob Trevor has already mentioned it—the suits of black cloth he saw in the Mercutian camp in Wyoming. It was not, as he had afterward supposed, a dye for fabrics. Instead, it was the thread of a worm—like our silk worm—which in its natural state was black and was impervious to the ray. By that I mean a substance whose molecules increased their vibration rate only slightly from a brief contact with the ray.

It was only partly efficacious, for after an exposure of a minute or more the intense heat of the ray was communicated. It then became partly penetrable, and anything close behind it would be destroyed.

We had under manufacture at this time a number of protective devices by which this substance might be used. Boats had, in the past, been equipped with a sort of shield or hood in front, making them more or less impervious to a direct horizontal beam of the light.

Tao's boats which now threatened us were so protected, I was informed by the girls who reported them. Recognizing the probability of an attack by us from the air, they also had a covering of the cloth, like a canopy above them. But as may be readily understood, such protection could be made only partly effective.

I had already manufactured, at Miela's suggestion, a number of shields for our girls to carry while in flight. These consisted of the fabric in very light, almost diaphanous, form, hung upon a flexible frame of very thin strips of bamboo. It was some twelve feet broad across the top, narrowing rapidly into a long fluttering tail like a kite.

There was nothing rigid about this shield. Its two or three bamboo ribs were as flexible as a whip, with the veiling—it was hardly more than that—fluttering below them almost entirely unsupported. In weight, the whole approximated one-twelfth that of a girl, not at all a difficult amount to carry.

Within two hours after the report came—

it was near midday—we were ready to start from the Great City to repel Tao's attack. Our forces consisted of some six hundred girls, each armed with a light-ray cylinder and a shield. This was the organization I have already mentioned, fifty squads of ten, each with a leader; and fifty other girls, the most daring and expert in the air, who were to act independently.

We had two platforms, protected by the fabric, and with a sort of canopy around the sides underneath, over which the girls grasping the handles could fly. Mercer and Anina rode on one platform, and Miela and I on the other. All of us were dressed in the black garments.

On each of the platforms we had mounted a projector of higher power than the hand cylinders, although of course of much less effective range than those the Mercutians had used in Wyoming.

Thus equipped we rose into the air from the castle grounds in the Great City, with a silent, awed multitude watching us—as strange an army, probably, as ever went forth to battle.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BATTLE.

WE swept out over the Great City, flying in the battle formation we had used many times before on our trips about the country. Mercer's platform and mine were some fifty feet apart, leading. Behind us, in a great semicircle, the girls spread out, fifty little groups of ten, each with its single leader in front. Below, a hundred feet perhaps, the fifty other girls darted back and forth, keeping pace with us. The aspect of these girls, flying thus to battle, was truly extraordinary. The pink-white flesh of their bodies; their limbs incased in the black veiling; their long black or golden hair; and the vivid red or blue feathered wings flashing behind those wide, fluttering, flimsy black shields—it was a sight the like of which I never shall see again.

There was almost no wind, for which I was thankful, as it made our maneuvers in the air considerably less difficult. When

we reached the Narrow Sea our patrols reported that Tao's ships were still in the river, waiting for others from the Lone City to join them. We hastened on, for I wished to meet them as near the Twilight shore as possible.

We believed, from the reports our girls had brought us, that the enemy would have some twenty or thirty boats, most of them similar to that in which Mercer and Anina weathered the storm on the way to the Water City.

We assumed that the men in the boats would be armed with the hand light-ray cylinders. These projected a beam not over four inches broad and had an effective range of about five hundred feet. The boats probably would carry large projectors also. They might be set up in the boats ready for use, or they might not.

What range they would have we could not estimate, though we hoped we should encounter nothing more powerful than this one Miela and I had on the platform. Its beam was about twenty inches wide, its effective radius something like a thousand feet.

We did not expect to encounter the very large projectors. We had some in the Great City with a range of something like ten miles, and others of lesser range that spread the ray out fan shape. But these were extremely heavy, and we were confident it would not be practical to mount them in the boats.

We sighted the enemy in the Narrow Sea just before the Twilight shore was reached. The first intimation we had was the sight of one of the narrow beams of red-green light flashing about in the twilight. As we crept closer, at an altitude of some two thousand feet, we saw the dim outlines of the boats in the water below.

There were, I made out, some ten or fifteen in sight. They were heading out into the sea in single file. Miela and I had carefully discussed the tactics we were to employ. Mercer understood our plans, and we had three or four girls detailed to fly close to the platforms and carry our orders about to the leaders of the various little squads.

We sighted the boats when we were about

a mile away, and, as I have said, at an altitude of some two thousand feet. They must have seen us soon afterward, for many light-rays now began flashing up from them.

So far as I could determine, each boat seemed armed only with one mounted projector; these I believed to be of somewhat similar power to our own. Our first move was to poise directly over the enemy, rising to an altitude of twenty-five hundred feet. The boats kept straight on their way, and we followed them, circling overhead in lengthening spirals, but keeping well out of range.

I had ordered that none of the rays be flashed at this time, and it must have been difficult for the men in the boats below to see us in the dusk, shrouded as we were in black. They sent up a rocket once: it mounted above us in a slow flaming arc, hung poised an instant, and then descended, plunging into the sea a mile or so away. We heard distinctly the hiss of its contact with the water, and saw, like a quickly dissipating mist, the cloud of steam that arose.

We were not armed with these rockets, for to discharge them from the platforms would have been impractical. But we did not fear them being used against us. Even if true aim had been possible, we could easily avoid their slow flight.

The protecting canopy below the sides of our platform made it difficult to see what was going on below us. Miela and I lay prone, with our heads projecting over its forward end. In this position we had an unobstructed, though somewhat limited, view. The girls carrying us could see nothing. They were guided by watching the other girls flying near them, and by Miela's constant directions.

For some ten or fifteen minutes we circled about over the leading boat. The Twilight shore was now almost over the horizon. The boats showed as little black patches on the gray-black of the sea, but the lights flashing up from them were plainly visible.

The boat that led the line was quite perceptibly drawing away from the others. Already it was a thousand feet or more ahead of the nearest one following. We

waited through another period. This leading boat was now beyond range of the others, and, being isolated, I decided to attack it.

"Miela," I said, "tell them all to maintain this level. You and I will go down at that first boat. Have them all remain up here. Tell Mercer if anything goes wrong with us to act as he thinks best."

We waited while these commands were circulated about. Mercer's platform swept close over us, and he shouted: "We *won't* stay up here."

I persuaded him finally, and then we directed our girls to circle slowly downward with our platform. I ordered a slow descent, for I was in no mind to rush blindly into range of their ray.

We drooped down in a spiral, until at about fifteen hundred feet I ordered the girls to descend no farther. So far as I could make out now, this boat was protected from above by a broad overhanging canopy. Its sides evidently were open, or nearly so, for we could see now the smaller rays flashing out horizontally.

The large projector was mounted in the bow beyond the canopy. Its beam obviously could be directed into the air, for it was now swinging up toward us. But in the horizontal position its range was limited to an arc in front of the boat. I saw then that our play was to attack from a low level, since only in that way could we expect to reach a vulnerable spot in the boat's armor. And I believed that if we could keep behind it they could not reach us with their larger projector.

We swooped downward almost to the water level, and reached it a thousand feet perhaps off to one side of the boat and partly behind it. The smaller projectors flashed out at us, but we were beyond their range. The projector in the bow swung back and forth, and as we skimmed the surface of the water, heading toward the boat, it turned to face us.

What followed happened so quickly I had no time to consult with Miela. She directed our flight. I turned the current into our projector and tried to bring its beam to bear on the boat. We approached within some eight hundred feet of it, darting back

and forth, sometimes rising a hundred feet or more, sometimes skimming the surface, but always keeping behind the boat as it turned in an endeavor to face us.

My light-ray beam hit the water frequently, with a great boiling and hissing, sending up clouds of steam that for a moment obscured the scene. Once or twice our opponent's beam flashed over us, but we were beyond its arc before they could bring it directly to bear.

I grew confused at the rapid turns we made. The dark outlines of the boat, with its twenty or thirty flashing red and green lights, seemed everywhere at once. I swung my projector about as best I could, but the swiftly shifting target seemed too elusive. Once, as we dropped suddenly downward, I thought we should plunge into the hissing, roaring water below. Again, the opposing ray swung directly under us, as we darted upward to avoid it.

"I can't make it, Miela," I said. "Hold steady toward them if you can."

She did not answer, but kept her face over the platform's end and issued her swift directions to the girls. Once, as we tilted sharply upward, I caught a glimpse of a black shape sweeping past, overhead. It was Mercer's platform, flying unswervingly toward the boat, its red-green beam steady before it like a locomotive headlight. We turned to follow; my own light swung dangerously near Mercer, and I turned the current off hastily.

The wind of our forward flight whistled past my ears; Miela's directions to the girls rose shrill above it. I caught a glimpse of the darting lights of the boat ahead. Then, when we were hardly more than six hundred feet away, Mercer's light picked it up. I saw the little lurid red circle it made as it struck the boat's canopy top, and roved along it end to end. Mercer's platform darted lower, and from that angle his light swept under the canopy. A man's scream of agony came to us across the water. The lights on the boat were extinguished; only the yellow glare of the flames rising from its interior fittings remained.

Then, a moment later, the boat's stern rose into the air, and it slid hissing into the

water, leaving only a little wreckage and a few struggling forms on the swirling surface.

We swung sharply upward. Again Mercer's platform—its light now extinguished—swept directly over us. His exultant voice floated down.

"We did it, Alan! We did it! Come on up!"

We rose to the upper air, where the girls were still circling about. The other boats were keeping on their course, spreading farther apart now to be out of range of each other's projectors. I had hoped they would turn back with this catastrophe to their leader, but they did not.

I consulted hastily with Miela, and then we gave the order for a general attack, allowing each of the leading girls to act as she saw fit.

Like a great flock of birds we swooped downward upon our prey, spreading out to attack all the boats at once. The girls now turned on their hand lights—a myriad tiny beams darting about in the semidarkness.

I cannot attempt to describe the scene that followed. It can be imagined, perhaps, but not told in words. As we swept within range of the lights that swung up from below to meet us, I saw a girl, flying alone, pass directly through one of the red beams. It seemed to strike her sidewise. In an instant she had passed beyond it. I saw the dim outlines of her form as she fluttered onward, wavering and aimless like a wounded bird. And then she fell, turning over and over as with one wing she strove vainly to support herself, until at last, wrapped in the sable shroud of her shield, she plunged with a great splash into the sea.

The flashing light-rays all about us now seemed mingled in inextricable confusion. The girls must have passed through them frequently, protected by their shields; and I know our platform was several times struck by them from below. The absence of sound was uncanny. Only the whistling wind of our flight, the flapping of the girl's wings, and the hissing of steam as our rays struck the water, accompanied this inferno of light.

We swept beyond the boat we had singled out, passing five or six hundred feet

above it, and in the effort to avoid its ray turning so that I was unable to bring mine upon it. As we rose again, beyond it, I saw a boat off to the left in flames. A dozen girls had rushed upon it, darting in among its smaller rays to where their own would be effective. But there was only one girl above it now, struggling brokenly to maintain herself in flight. The boat sank with the roar of an explosion of some kind, but in the sudden darkness about I could still see this lone wounded girl fluttering onward.

We were not far away; I pointed her out to Miela, and instead of swinging back we kept on toward her. We contrived to pass close under her, and she fell abruptly almost into my arms. I stretched her out gently on the platform and turned back to Miela, who was kneeling behind our projector.

We were now nearly half a mile from the nearest of the boats. Several of them evidently had been sunk, and two or three others were sinking. One I could make out heading back for the Twilight shore; above it the lights of our girls following showed vivid against the dark-gray sky. Where Mercer's platform was I could not tell.

Miela gripped my shoulder.

"See, Alan—there!" She pointed off to one side. "One of the boats tries to escape."

We were now some five hundred feet above the water. Half a mile beyond us, all its lights out, one of the boats was scurrying away, on across toward the Light Country. For some reason none of our girls seemed following it.

Miela issued a sharp command; we swooped downward at lightning speed and, barely skimming the surface, flew after this escaping enemy. Whether its larger projector had been rendered inoperative, or many of its crew killed, or whether it thought merely to escape us and make a landing in the Light Country, I did not know.

Whatever the reason, no lights showed from this boat as we drew after it. I had our own light out. When we came close within range I flashed it on suddenly. We were flying steadily, and I picked up the

boat without difficulty, raking it through from stern to stem under its protecting canopy. I could see the canopy drop as its supporting metal framework fused in the heat of the ray; flames rose from the interior wooden fittings; the boat's stern seemed to melt away as the thin metal was rendered molten; the water about it boiled under the heat. A cloud of steam then rose up, obscuring it completely from my sight.

I switched off the light. We continued on, rising a little. The steam dissipated. Directly below us on the bubbling, swirling water a few twisted black forms bobbed about. We were so close now I could see them plainly. I looked away hastily.

We swung back toward the Twilight shore, rising sharply. There seemed now only one boat afloat. Far above it I saw a tiny black oblong that I knew was Mercer's platform. A swarm of other dots, with the tiny pencils of red light flashing from them, showed where the cloud of girls were swooping down to the attack. Now that we were out of the action, I had opportunity to watch what was going on more closely.

This last engagement seemed to last less than a minute. The girls darted fearlessly downward among the rays that swung up from the boat. Scores of them were hit; I could see their forms illuminated for an instant by the lurid red and green light. Some passed through it safely; many fell. But those who got within range hit the boat without difficulty. Its lights went out suddenly and a moment later it sank. The girls' lights flashed off, and they rose again into the air—tiny black shapes circling about Mercer's platform.

The scene now seemed suddenly very dark, peaceful and still. A great weight lifted from my heart, though it still remained heavy with what I had seen. I turned to Miela; her face was white and drawn.

"We have won, my girl," I said.

She smiled wanly.

"We have won. But, oh, Alan, that women should have to do such deeds!"

Her eyes shone with the light of a soul in sorrow,

"Pray to your God now, my husband, that this war may be the last, for all time, in all the universe."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SIEGE OF THE LONE CITY.

OUR losses totaled nearly a hundred and fifty girls. We brought back with us on the platforms but six wounded. I shall never forget that hour we spent searching among the wreckage—those blackened, twisted forms of what had once been men and women. I shall not describe it.

Of all the boats which Tao had dispatched on this ill-fated expedition, only one escaped to return with news of the disaster. I was glad now that one, at least, had survived, for the report it would give would, I felt sure, dissuade Tao from making any other similar attempt at invasion.

Our broken little army made its way slowly back to the Great City. We went, not in triumph, but indeed with all the aspect of defeat. The people received us in a frenzy of joy and gratitude to the girls for what they had done.

This first battle took place, as I have said, just after we four had returned from our tour of the Light Country, and before the recruiting of the young men was fairly under way. To this recruiting it proved an extraordinary stimulus. The girls, having been in successful action, stirred the young men of the nation as probably nothing else could, and all over the country they came forward faster than they could be enrolled.

It was two or three days after the battle that Miela came to me one morning with the wounded girl she and I had rescued in the air.

"We have a plan—Sela and I—my husband," she said.

The girl seemed hardly more than a sweet little child—fifteen or sixteen, perhaps. It gave me a shock now to realize that we had allowed her to go into such a combat. One of her blue-feathered wings was bound in a cloth. Its lower portion, I could tell, had been burned away.

"Never will she fly again, my husband,"

said Miela, "for she is one of those who has sacrificed her wings that we might all be safe from the invader."

She then went on to explain that now, while this feeling of gratitude to the girls ran so high among the people, the time seemed propitious for changing the long-hated law regarding their wings. I had not thought of that, but agreed with her wholly.

I called the people into the castle gardens that same night. Never had I seen such a gathering. We allowed fully ten thousand to come in; the rest we were forced to send away.

Miela made a speech, telling them that in recognition of the girls' services in this war, I had decided to allow them henceforth to keep their wings un mutilated after marriage. We exhibited this little girl, Sela, as one who had given her power of flight, not as a sacrifice on the altar of man's selfishness, but in the service of her country. Then Sela herself made a speech, in her earnest little child voice, pleading for her sisters.

When she ended there may have been some unmarried men in our audience who were still against the measure—doubtless there were—but they were afraid or ashamed to let their feeling be known. When the meeting broke up I had ample evidence of the people's wishes upon which to proceed.

Within a week my congress met, and the law was repealed. We informed the other cities of this action, and everywhere it was met with enthusiasm.

Enlistment and war preparations went steadily on, but despite it all there were more marriages that next month—three times over—than in any before. I had now been in power some three months, and the time was approaching when we were ready to make our invasion of the Twilight Country. We had been maintaining a rigid aerial patrol of the Narrow Sea, but no further activities of the enemy had been threatened.

The expedition, when it was ready, numbered about a thousand young men, each armed with one of the hand light-ray cylinders—fifty officers, and about fifty older

men in charge of the projectors and rockets, who, for want of a better term, I might call our artillery corps. There was also the organization of girls, and a miscellaneous corps of men to handle the boats, mechanics to set up the projectors, and a commissariat.

The thousand young men represented those we had selected from the several thousand enlisted in the Great City. All the rest, and the many thousands in the other cities, we were holding in reserve.

We took with us, on this invading expedition, only small-wheeled trucks, on which to convey the larger projectors, and storage tanks and other heavy apparatus, for the Lone City river ran directly to the point where we planned to conduct our siege.

Some forty large boats were required to carry the men, ammunition and supplies. Mercer and I, with Anina and Miela, traveled as before through the air on the two platforms with the girls. We crossed the Narrow Sea without incident and entered the river.

Several hours up, the river narrowed and entered a rocky gorge, four or five hundred feet wide and a thousand feet deep, with almost perpendicular sides. Along one of these ran the Lone City trail. We passed through this gorge. The river here flowed with a current that amounted almost to rapids. Our boats made slow progress. Finally we emerged into an even wilder country, almost devoid of trees. Here we made our first night's encampment.

Noon of the next day found us approaching the Lone City. We did not need to surmise now that Tao would be warned, for far away on the horizon ahead we saw the beams from his great projectors mounting up into the blackness of the sky. Some four miles from the Lone City the river we were ascending swept off to the right. This was its closest point to the city, and here we disembarked. There were several docks and a few houses, but we found them all deserted.

The Lone City was particularly well suited to defense, even though the lay of the country was such that we were enabled to approach here within four miles, and establish our base in comparative safety.

The country was wild and rocky, with few trees. The river bed lay in a cañon. From where we landed, a valley so deep and narrow, it might almost be termed a cañon, also led up to the city.

This valley was some two miles wide, with a level floor, and precipitous, rocky sides towering in many places over a thousand feet. Above it stretched a broken plateau country. The valley had many sharp bends and turns, as though in some distant past it had been the bed of a great river that had eroded its tortuous course through the rock.

The Lone City lay shut in at the bottom of this valley between two of its bends. It was a settlement of perhaps ten thousand people, the only city in the Twilight Country, with one exception, on this hemisphere of Mercury.

We established our field base here at the river, and I devoted the next few days to informing myself of the exact lay of the country, and the methods of defense of the city Tao had provided.

I found this defense the height of simplicity, and for its purpose as effective as it well could be. A vertical barrage of light surrounded the city, extending upward into the air with the most powerful projectors some ten or fifteen miles, and, with those of the spreading rays, forming a solid wall of light at the lower altitudes. There were no projectors past the first turn in the valley toward the river—where they could have been directed horizontally—and none of them on the cliff tops above the city. Thus, although we could not get over this light-barrage, we could approach it closely in many places.

Tao's tactics became immediately evident. He had thrown an almost impregnable barrier close about him and, trusting to its protection, was making no effort to combat us for the moment with any moves of offense.

My first endeavor was to find a position on top of the cliffs from which the city could be reached with a projector. It was practically the only thing to do. The city could not be approached in front from the valley floor: its entire surface beyond the turn was swept by the light-rays. Ap-

proach from below in the rear was likewise barred.

Had the barrage been not so high our girls might have flown over it and dropped bombs, or we might have sent rockets over it and dropped them into the city. Neither of these projects was practical. The girls could not fly over that barrage. It was too cold in the higher altitudes. Nor could we send rockets over, for rockets sent through the light were exploded before they could reach their mark.

The projectors along the sides of the city were located for the most part a hundred feet or more back from the base of the surrounding cliffs. This allowed them to cut the cliff face at the top. It will be understood then that we could approach the brink of the cliff in many places, but never sufficiently near to be able to direct our rays downward into the city.

These cliffs were exceedingly jagged and broken. They overhung in many places. Great rifts split them; ravines wound their way down, many of these with small, stunted trees growing in them. A descent from the summit to the floor of the valley, had we been unimpeded by the light, would in many places not have been difficult.

During the next week we succeeded—working in the prevailing gloom—in establishing a projector at the mouth of a ravine which emerged at the cliff face hardly a hundred feet from the valley bottom. This point was below the spreading light-rays which swept the cliff top above. We mounted the projector without discovery, and, flashing it on suddenly, swept the valley with its rays. An opposing ray from below picked it out almost immediately, and destroyed it, killing two of our men.

The irregularities of the cliffs made several other similar attempts possible. We took advantage of them, and in each case were able to rake the valley with our fire for a moment before our projector was located and destroyed. One, which we were at great pains to protect, was maintained for a somewhat longer period.

I believed we had done an immense amount of damage by these momentarily active projectors, although our enemy gave no sign.

We then tried dropping rockets at the base of the lights in the valley. There were few points at which they could be reached without striking the rays first. But we persisted, sending up a hundred or more. Most were ineffective; a few found their mark, as we could tell by a sudden "hole" in the barrage, which, however, was invariably repaired before we could make it larger.

These activities lasted a week or more. It began to look as though we had entered upon a lengthy siege. I wondered how long the city's food supply would last if we settled down to starve it out. The thought came to me then that Tao might be almost ready for his second expedition to the earth. Was he indeed merely standing us off in this way so that some day he might depart in his vehicle before our very eyes?

Tao began to adopt our tactics. Without warning one day a projector from a towering eminence near the city flashed down at the river encampment. That we were not entirely destroyed was due to the extreme watchfulness of our guards, who located it immediately with their rays. As it was, we lost nearly a hundred men in the single moment it was in operation.

We then withdrew our camp farther away down the river, to a point where the conformation of the country made a repetition of this attack impossible. A sort of guerilla warfare now began in the mountains. Our scouting parties frequently met Tao's men, and many encounters, swiftly fatal to one side or the other, took place. But all the time we were able, at intervals, to rake the valley without fire for brief periods.

Mercer constantly was evolving plans of the utmost daring, most of them indeed amounting practically to suicide for those undertaking them. But I held him back. Our present tactics were dangerous enough, although after the first few fatalities we succeeded in protecting our men, even though our projectors were invariably destroyed.

One of Mercer's plans we tried with some success. There were some places in the light-barrage that were much less high than others. We devised a smaller rocket that could be fired from the platforms. Mercer took it up some twenty thousand feet, and

sent several rockets over the light, which we hoped dropped into the city.

A month went by in this way. We were in constant communication by water with the Great City, receiving supplies and reinforcements of men and armament. And then gradually the situation changed. Over a period of several days our hand-to-hand encounters with the enemy grew less frequent. Finally two or three days went by without one of them taking place.

We became bolder and prepared to establish several projectors at different points for simultaneous fire at a given signal. The light-barrage in the valley remained unchanged, although now its beams held steady instead of sometimes swinging to and fro. We dislodged one of its projectors with a rocket, making a hole in the barrage, which this time was not repaired. And then, to our amazement, the lights one by one began to die away. We ceased operations, waiting. Within half a day they had all vanished, like lights which had flickered and burned out.

Mercer, unthinking, was all for an instant attack. We could indeed have swept the valley now without difficulty; but there were thousands of people in the city—non-combatants, women and children—and to murder them to no purpose was not the sort of warfare we cared to make.

It seemed probable that Tao had evacuated his position. The valley beyond the city led up into the mountains toward the Dark City, almost on the borderland of the frozen wastes of the Dark Country. Tao had protected this valley from behind so that we had been unable to penetrate it without making a detour of over twenty miles. This I had not done, although had the siege lasted longer I think with our next reinforcement we should have attempted it.

With the extinguishing of the lights our long-range activities ceased. We anticipated some trick, and for several days remained quiet. Our girls could have flown over the city; but this I would not allow, fearing that a ray would bring them suddenly down.

Miela and myself, occupying one of the stone houses down by the river, held a consultation there with Mercer and Anina.

Mercer, as usual, was for instant action.

"We might as well march right in," he declared. "They're out of business, or they've gone—one or the other."

"To the Dark City they have gone, I think," Anina said.

"I think so, too," Mercer agreed.

"I'll go in alone on foot," I said, "and find out what has happened."

But Miela shook her head.

"One who can fly will go more safely. I shall go."

"Not you, my sister," Anina said quietly. "Warfare is not for you—now. That you can understand, can you not? I shall go."

Mercer insisted on accompanying her; and he did, part of the way, waiting while she flew close over the city. It was several hours before they returned, reporting that the place was almost in ruins, and that Tao and his men had fled some time before, leaving the light-barrage to burn itself out. The next day, with our men in the black cloth suits of armor marching up the valley, and the girls with their black shields flying overhead, we took possession of all that remained of the Lone City.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE END OF TAO.

THE scene of desolation that met us in the Lone City was at once extraordinary and awesome. It seemed impossible that our rays, acting for so brief a period, could have done so much damage. The city was nothing more than a semicivilized settlement of little, flat-topped stone houses. Our rays, striking these, had discharged harmlessly into the ground. But the interiors had been penetrated through windows and doors, and everything inflammable about them, as well as about the streets, had been destroyed.

The people had taken refuge in cellars underground and in caves and crevices—wherever they could find shelter. But even so, there were a thousand dead in that city that morning, and rapidly spreading disease would shortly have killed them all. They came out of their hiding places little by little as we entered the streets, and stood

about in groups staring at us sullenly. They seemed mostly old men and women and children, the younger men having fled with Tao's army. They were heavy-set, apathetic people, with broad, heavy faces, pasty-white skin, and large protruding eyes. We were in the Lone City nearly a month, burying the dead, doing what we could for the people, and destroying or removing the apparatus Tao had left behind him.

The Lone City, before the banishment of Tao, had been one of the most primitive settlements of the Twilight region. It was in the other hemisphere that the Twilight Country was more densely populated; but since this Lone City was so close to the Great City it had become the scene of Tao's exile.

This region about the Lone City was of the most barren of the whole Twilight country. Its people were almost entirely meat eaters. Back toward the Dark Country great bands of animals like caribou roamed. Living almost entirely in darkness, they had little power of sight, and were easy prey to hunters.

Their hides, which were covered with short, white fur, provided clothing; a form of candle was made from their fat, and used for lighting; and their flesh provided food. The Dark City, some two hundred and fifty miles away, was the center from which most of these animals were obtained.

"Then, that's where Tao has been getting his supplies from," Mercer exclaimed, as we heard all this from one of the Twilight People. "And that's where he has gone now."

Tao had indeed withdrawn to the Dark City, we learned positively. And more than that, we learned that he had factories there as well as here. We found in the Lone City some eight of the interplanetary vehicles—most of them almost entirely completed. The fact that Tao had abandoned them so readily made us believe he had others in the Dark City.

There seemed a curious lack of appliances for protection against the ray. This we attributed to two causes—that Tao had managed to take most of them with him, and that his supply of fabric came from distant cities on the other side of the globe.

Within a month after we had occupied the Lone City we were again ready to start forward. It had been an irksome month for Mercer, and not a day had passed without my receiving a truculent declaration from him that we were fools to allow Tao to escape so easily.

Our occupation of the Lone City was to continue. On this second expedition farther into the Twilight Country I took with me a much smaller and more select force. We had before us a land journey of some two hundred and fifty miles, through an unknown, barren country, in which it would be difficult for us to maintain ourselves, so I was determined to be burdened with as few men as possible.

Our force consisted of all the older men trained in the operation of the larger projectors and rockets; a variety of mechanics and helpers, men selected for their physical strength; a corps of young men to the number of fifty, and fifty girls.

We did not take the platforms, for I assumed it would be too cold for the girls to make sustained flights. Against this cold we provided ourselves well with the white furry garments of the Twilight People. I need not go into details of our march to the Dark City. It occupied some three weeks. We met with no opposition, passing a few isolated settlements, whose inhabitants rather welcomed us than otherwise.

This region we passed through took us almost to the ill-defined borders of the Dark Country. It was not mountainous, but rather more a great broken plateau with a steady ascent. Each day it grew darker and colder, until at last we entered perpetual night. It was not the sort of night we know on earth, but a Stygian blackness.

We used little torches now, of the light-ray current, and our little army, trudging along in their lurid glare, and dragging its wagons piled high with the projectors, presented a curious and weird picture. The country for the most part was barren rock, with a few stunted trees growing in the ravines and crevices. There was an abundance of water.

We encountered several rainstorms, and once during the last week it snowed a little. Except for the storms, the wind held steady,

a gentle breeze from the colder regions in front blowing back toward the Light Country behind us.

During the latter days of our journey I noticed a curious change in the ground. It seemed now, in many places, to be like a soft, chalky limestone, which ran in pockets and seams between strata of very hard rock. I called Miela's attention to it once, and she pointed out a number of irregular shaped, small masses of a substance which in daylight I assumed might be yellow. These were embedded in the soft limestone.

"Sulphur," she said. "Like that on your earth. There is much of it up here, I have heard."

The Dark City occupied a flat plateau, slightly elevated above the surrounding country, and on the brink of a sheer drop of some six or seven thousand feet to an arm of the polar sea.

Our problems now were very different from when we had laid siege to the Lone City. The conformation of the country allowed us no opportunity to approach closer than two or three miles to the barrage of light, we must expect. We could not reach the city from these nearest points with our projectors.

There were many lateral ravines depressed below the upper surface of the main plateau, and though the light-rays from the city, directed horizontally, would sweep their tops, we found we could traverse many of them a considerable distance in safety. But from the bottoms of them we could only fire our rockets without specific aim and our projectors not at all.

Only by the most fortuitous of circumstances did we escape complete annihilation the first moment we appeared within range. We had no idea what lay ahead—although the guides we had brought with us from the Lone City informed us we were nearing our destination—and the scene remained in complete darkness until we were hardly more than five miles outside Tao's stronghold.

Then, without warning, his lights flashed on—not only a vertical barrage, but a horizontal one as well—sweeping the higher points of the entire country around for a distance of twelve or fifteen miles.

We were, at the moment, following the bottom of a narrow gully. Had we been on any of the upper reaches of the plateau we would undoubtedly have been picked out by one of the roving beams of light and destroyed.

We camped where we were, and again for several days I attempted nothing, devoting myself to a thorough exploration of the country about us. The Dark City appeared impregnable. Beams of light from Tao's larger projectors were constantly roaming about the entire plateau that surrounded it, and every higher point of vantage from which one of ours could have reached them must have been struck by their rays a score of times a day.

It will be understood, of course, that any place where we could mount one of the higher powered projectors, a task of several hours at best, and strike the city, must of necessity be also within range of their rays, for theirs were as powerful as ours. Upon observation I felt convinced that should we attempt to mount a projector anywhere on these higher points it would be sought out and destroyed long before we could bring it into action.

That this was Tao's stronghold, and not the Lone City, now became evident. I could readily understand why he had retreated here. Fully four times as many projectors as he had in operation in the Lone City were now in evidence. Those of shorter range, and spreading rays, kept the entire country bathed in steady light for several miles around him, while the larger ones—a hundred of them possibly—roved constantly over the black emptiness beyond.

From our encampment we could advance but little farther. Fortunately, retreat was open to us; and once beyond the circle of steady light, we had no difficulty in moving about in the darkness, even though momentarily we frequently were within range of the single light-beams, had they chanced to swing upon us.

This was the situation which, even Mercer agreed, appeared hopeless. We explored the brink of the precipice below which lay the sea. It was a sheer drop of many thousand feet. Although a descent might have

been made closer to the Dark City, certainly it was not possible at any point we could reach. We sent our girls down, and they reported that from below it appeared probable that access to the ocean was had by the Dark City some miles farther along. They went but a short distance, for Tao's lights were occasionally sweeping about; and more than that, they could make but very short flights, owing to the cold.

To starve Tao out appeared equally as impractical as a direct attack. With our little army we could not surround the city on a circumference of some eighty miles. We might, indeed, have barred the several roads that entered it, but it seemed probable that if Tao wanted to come out he would come, for all we could do to stop him. And yet to starve him out seemed our only possible plan.

"We'll have to send back for reinforcements," I told Mercer, Miela and Anina at one of our many conferences. "An army of several thousand, if we can maintain it up here."

And then, the very next day, Mercer and Anina came forward with their discovery. We had set up our encampment of little black fabric tents in a ravine some six miles outside the city, securely hidden by surrounding cliffs. Above us across the black sky the greenish-red beams of Tao's light-rays swept continually to and fro. Miela and I were sitting together disconsolately in our tent, reviewing the situation, when Mercer and Anina burst in. They had been roaming about together, exploring the country, and came in now full of excitement and enthusiasm to tell us what they had found. We two were to accompany them. They would tell us no more than that; and as soon as we had all eaten we started off. It would be a trip of several hours, Mercer said, and would take us around to the other side and partly behind the Dark City.

We followed no road, but scrambled along over the open country, picking our way as best we could, and using the lights from the city to give us direction. The two girls half walked, half flew, and Mercer and I, with our ability to take huge leaps, made rapid progress.

The night was black—that unluminous blackness that seems to swallow everything, even objects near at hand. We made our way along, using little hand searchlights that threw a red glare a short distance before us.

We kept down in the gulleys as much as possible, avoiding the higher places where Tao's long-range beams were constantly striking, and passed around in front of the Dark City, keeping always at least five miles away.

We had been traveling two or three hours, and still Mercer and Anina gave us no clue to what we were about to see. It began to snow. Huge, soft flakes soon lay thick on the ground.

"Mercer, where are you taking us?" I exclaimed once.

"You shall see very soon now," Anina answered me. "What we have found, Ollie and I—and our plan—you shall understand it soon."

We had to be content with that. An hour later we found ourselves well around behind the Dark City and hardly more than four miles outside it. A great jagged cliff-face, two hundred feet high perhaps, fronted us. We, at its base, were on comparatively low ground here, with another low line of cliffs shading us from the light-beams of the city.

Mercer and Anina stopped and pointed upward at the cliff. A huge seam of the soft, chalky limestone ran laterally for five hundred feet or more across its face. I saw embedded in this seam great irregular masses of sulphur.

"There you are," said Mercer triumphantly. "Sulphur—stacks of it. All we have to do is set fire to it. With the wind blowing this way—right toward the city—" His gesture was significant.

The feasibility of the plan struck us at once. It was an enormous deposit of free sulphur. From this point the prevailing wind blew directly across the city. The sulphur lay in great masses sufficiently close together so that if we were to set fire to it in several places with our small light-ray torches we could be assured of its burning steadily. And its fumes, without warning, blowing directly over the city— I shud-

dered as the whole thing became clear to me.

"Good God, man—"

"That 'll smoke 'em out," declared Mercer, waving his hand again toward the cliff. "I ask you now, won't that smoke 'em out?"

"Tao's men—yes." Miela's face was grave as she answered Mercer's triumphant question. "It will do that, Ollie. Kill them all, of a certainty; but that whole city there—"

Mercer stared at his feet, toying idly with the little torch in his hand.

"Can you think of any other way to get at Tao?" he asked.

Anina met my eyes steadily.

"There is no other way," she said quietly. "It must be done. It is your world—your people—we must think of now. And you know there is no other way."

We decided at last to try it. Once we had made the decision, we proceeded as quickly as possible to put the plan into execution. We moved our encampment farther away, well out of danger from the fumes.

We mounted several of the projectors in positions where their rays could reach the surrounding country, and the sky, although not the city itself. Then, ordering our men and girls to hold themselves in readiness for whatever might occur, we four went off together to fire the sulphur.

The wind was blowing directly toward the city as we stood at the base of the cliff, a silent little group. I think that now, at this moment, we all of us hesitated in awe at what we were about to do.

Mercer broke the tension.

"Come on, Alan—let's start it off. Now is the time—a lot of places at once."

We flashed on our little light-rays, and in a moment the sulphur was on fire at a score of different points. We drew off a few hundred feet to one side and sat down to watch it in the darkness. Overhead Tao's red beams swept like giant searchlights across the inky sky.

The sulphur started burning with tiny little spots of wavering blue flame that seemed, many of them, about to die away. Gradually they grew larger, spreading out

slowly and silently in ever-widening circles. Under the heat of the flames the sulphur masses became molten, turned into a viscous dark red fluid that boiled and bubbled heavily and dropped spluttering upon the ground.

Slowly the blue-green flames spread about, joining each other and making more rapid headway—a dozen tiny volcanoes vomiting their deadly fumes and pouring forth their sluggish, boiling lava. The scene about us now was lighted in a horrible blue-green glare. A great cloud of thin smoke gathered, hung poised a moment, and then rolled slowly away—its deadly fumes hanging low to the ground and spreading ever wider as though eager to clutch the unsuspecting city in their deadly embrace.

The entire face of the cliff was now covered with the crawling blue fire, lapping avidly about with its ten-foot tongues. We drew back, staring silently at each other's ghastly green faces.

"Let's—let's get away," Mercer whispered finally. "No use staying here now."

We hurried back to the nearest place where one of our projectors was set up. The two men guarding it looked at us anxiously, and smiled triumphantly when Miela told them what we had done. We stood beside them a moment, then Miela and I climbed to an eminence near by from which we had an unobstructed view of the city.

The light-barrage still held steady. The individual, higher-powered projectors as before swung their beams lazily about the country. We sat partly in the shelter of a huge boulder, behind which we could have dropped quickly had one of them turned our way.

"Soon it will be there," Miela said softly, when we had been sitting quiet for a time.

I did not answer. It was indeed too solemn a thing for words, this watching from the darkness while an invisible death, let loose by our own hands, stole down upon our complacent enemies.

A few moments more we watched—and still the scene before us showed no change. Then, abruptly, the lights seemed to waver; some of the beams swung hurriedly to and

fro, then remained motionless in unusual positions, as though the men at their levers in sudden panic had abandoned them.

My heart was beating violently. What hidden tragedy was being enacted behind that silent barrier of light? I shuddered as my imagination conjured up hideous pictures of that unseen death that now must be stalking about those city streets, entering those homes, polluting the air with its stifling, noisome breath, and that even at this distance seemed clutching at my own lungs.

I suppose the whole thing *did* last only a moment. There was little in what we saw of significance had we not known. But we did know—and the knowledge left us trembling and unnerved.

I leaped to my feet, pulling Miela after me, and in a few moments more we were back beside the projector we had left with Mercer and Anina. Suddenly a white shape appeared in the sky over the city. It passed perilously close above the shattered light-barrage and came sailing out in our direction.

Mercer jumped for the projector, but I was nearer, and in a moment I had flashed it on.

"It's Tao!" Mercer shouted. "He—"

It was one of Tao's interplanetary vehicles, rising slowly in a great arc above us. I swung our light-beams upward; it swept across the sky and fell upon the white shape; the thing seemed to poise in its flight, as though held by the little red circle of light that fastened upon it, boring its way in. Then, slowly at first, it fell; faster and faster it dropped, until it struck the ground with a great crash—the first and only sound of all this soundless warfare.

It was three days before the great sulphur deposit we had ignited burned itself out. The lights of the city had all died away, and blackness such as I never hope to experience again settled down upon the scene.

We approached the Dark City then; we even entered one or two of its outlying houses; but beyond that we did not go, for we had made certain of what we wanted to know.

I remember my father once describing how, when a young man, he had gone to the little island of Martinique shortly after the great volcanic outbreak of Mount Pelée. I remember his reluctance to dwell upon the scenes he saw there in that silent city of St. Pierre—the houses with their dead occupants, stricken as they were sitting about the family table; the motionless forms in the streets, lying huddled where death had overtaken them in their sudden panic. That same reluctance silences me now, for one does not voluntarily dwell upon such scenes as those.

A day or so later we found the interplanetary projectile which had sought to escape. Amid its wreckage lay the single, broken form of Tao—that leader who, plotting the devastation of two worlds for his own personal gain, had at the very last deserted his comrades and met his death alone.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE RETURN.

THERE is but little more to add. With the death of Tao and the changing of the law concerning the virgins' wings, my mission on Mercury was over. But I did not think of that then, for with the war ended, my position as virtual ruler of the Light Country still held Mercer and me occupied with a multiplicity of details. It was a month or more after our return from the Twilight Country that Miela reminded me of father and my duty to him. "You have forgotten, my husband. But I have not. Your world—it calls you now. You must go back."

Go back home—to father and dear little Beth! I had not realized how much I had wanted it.

"What you have done for our nation—for our girls—can never be repaid, Alan. And you can do more in later years, perhaps. But now your father needs you—and we must think of him."

I cast aside every consideration of what changes would first have to be made here on Mercury, and decided in that moment to go.

But you must go with me, Miela," I

said, and then, as I thought of something else, I added gently: "You will, won't you, little wife? For you know I cannot leave you now."

She smiled her tender little smile.

"'Whither thou goest, I will go,' my husband," she quoted softly, "'for thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.'"

We were ready to start at the time of the next inferior conjunction of Mercury with the earth. At our combined pleading, and with the permission of his associates, Fuero was persuaded to take command of the nation during my absence; and I felt I was leaving affairs in able hands.

Lua refused to accompany us; but she urged Anina to go, and the little girl was ready enough to take advantage of her mother's permission.

Though he said nothing, I shall never forget Mercer's face as this decision was made.

The vehicle in which Miela had made her former trip was still lying in the valley where we had left it. We went away privately, only Lua and Fuero accompanying us out of the city.

Lua parted with her two daughters quietly. Her emotions at seeing them go she concealed under that sweet, gentle reserve which was characteristic of her always.

"Promise me you will be careful of her, Alan," she said softly as she kissed me at parting.

We landed in the Chilean Andes, with that patient statue of the Christ to welcome us back to earth. The Trans-Andean Railroad runs near it, and we soon were in the city of Buenos Aires. The two girls, with wings shrouded in their long cloaks, walked about its crowded streets with a wonderment I can only vaguely imagine. We had only what little money I had taken with me to Mercury. I interviewed a prominent banker of the city, told him in confidence who I was, and from him obtained necessary funds.

We cabled father then, and he answered at once that he would come down and join us. We waited for him down there, and in

another month he was with us—dear old gentleman, leaning over the steamer rail, trying to hold back the tears of joy that sprang into his eyes at sight of me. Little Beth was with him, too, smart and stylish as ever, and good old Bob Trevor, whom she shyly presented as her husband.

The beach at Mar del Plata, near Buenos Aires, is one of the most beautiful spots in South America; and on a clear moonlight night, with the Southern Cross overhead, it displays the starry heavens as few other places can on this earth.

On such a night in February, 1942, Mercer and Anina sat together on the sand, apart from the gay throng that crowded the pavilion below them. The girl was dressed all in white, with a long black cape covering her wings. Her beautiful blond hair was piled on her head in huge soft coils, and over it she had thrown a filmy, sky-blue mantilla that shone with a soft luster in the moonlight and seemed reflected in the blue of her eyes.

Mercer in white flannels sat beside her, cross-legged on the white sand, with a newly purchased Hawaiian guitar across his lap. From the band stand in the pavilion down the beach faint strains of music floated up to them. The moon silvered the water before them; a soft, gentle breeze of summer caressed their cheeks; the myriad stars glittered overhead like brilliant gems scattered on the turquoise velvet of the sky.

Anina, chin cupped in her hand, sat staring at the wonderful heavens that all her life before had been withheld from her sight. She sighed tremulously.

"I want to say this is a night," Mercer declared, breaking a long silence.

"It's—it's beautiful," she answered softly. "Those millions of worlds—like mine, perhaps—or like this one of yours." She turned to him. "Ollie, which of them is my world?"

"You can't see it now, Anina. It's too close to the sun."

Again she sighed. "I'm sorry for that. It would seem closer, perhaps, if we could see it."

"You're not sorry you came, Anina? You don't want to go back now?"

"Not now, Ollie." She smiled into his earnest, pleading eyes. "For those I love are here as well as there. I have Miela and Alan—and—"

"And?" Mercer leaned forward eagerly.

"And Miela's little son—that darling little baby. We must go back soon and see Miela. She will be wondering where we are."

Mercer sat back. "Oh," he said. "Yes, we must."

The band in the pavilion stopped its music. Mercer slid his little steel cross-piece over the guitar strings and began to play the haunting, crying music of the islands, the music of moonlight and love. After a moment he stopped abruptly.

"Anina, that little song you sang in the boat that day—you remember—the day we went to the Water City? Sing it again, Anina."

She sang it through softly, just as she had in the boat, to its last ending little half-sob.

Mercer laid his guitar on the sand beside him.

"You said that music talks to you, Anina—though sometimes you—you don't understand just what it tries to say. I feel it that way, too—only—only to-night—now—I think I *do* understand."

His voice was very soft and earnest and just a trifle husky.

"You said that it was a love-song, Anina, and it was sad because love is sad. Do you—think love is always sad?" He put out his hand awkwardly and touched hers. "Do you, Anina?" he whispered.

Her little figure swayed toward him. She half turned, and in her shining eyes he saw the light that needs no words to make its meaning clear.

The timidity that so often before had restrained him was swept away; he took her abruptly into his arms, kissing her hair, her eyes, her lips.

"Love isn't—always very sad, is it, Anina?"

Her arms held him close.

"I—I don't know," she breathed against his shoulder. "But it's—it's very—wonderful."



IZZY KAPLAN'S KOLUMN

Received via W. O. McGEEHAN

THE FATE OF EX-CHAMPIONS



WELL, I see where Kink Constantstein, which he used to be Kink of Greece, is out of a chob with a tough winter coming on. I don't even know if he was a good feller when he had it or not. I never knew no kinks in a personal way, but I never heard nobody speaking no good about them. There is a lot of knocking going on in this woild and you wouldn't know how to take some of the knocks. A lot of people is knocking me, but I never pay no attention to them on account I am too big a feller.

I am kind of sorry for this feller Constantstein on account it might be hard for him to get it another chob. When a feller is out everybody is bolting the door on him, and when he is in everybody is inviting him to sit down and take it a load off his feet.

Maybe an ex-kink is chust like a ex-champeen and a ex-champeen is the lonest feller in the woild. The only ex-champeen that people had any use for at all was Chon L. Solomon, which he was the best box fighter of them all until a young feller by the name Corbett hit him on all of his chins at the same time and knocked him cool. Then Chon L. Solomon became chust an ex-champeen, and people wasn't so glad to see him, only they never told him so on account Chon L. Solomon hit them first always and then asked them what they done him and why when they would come to at the hospital.

I don't know what nectinality it is that Chon L. Solomon was, but there was lots of Solomons in Lithuania where I come from, and some of them is relations of mine. Maybe Chon L. Solomon was one of them, though lots of people has told me that they thought he was an Irisher and that they seen him in a St. Petrick's Day parade. That don't mean nothing on account I was wunst in a St. Petrick's Day parade myself. I marched in it for protection, and you couldn't blame me if you lived in that neighborhood.

Even to-day there is a feller up in Harlem which whenever he would get a couple

drinks of slivowitz would come to me and say: "Izzy, you are a good feller and I would let you shook the hand which it shook the hand of Chon L. Solomon."

You never hear of a feller who esks you to shook the hand which it shook the hand of Chim Corbett or Chim Jeffries. Them two Chims is chust ex-champeens and ex-champeens is nix. They are chust like some feller which he failed in business, and you walk on the other side of the street when they are coming. Of course, before you get cool to the feller you find out whether he made a little something or lost the whole business on the failure on account some failures chust means that a feller is breaching out on a bigger scale, and it would be a rotten mistake to think that a feller who is making a failure for business reasons is really broke.

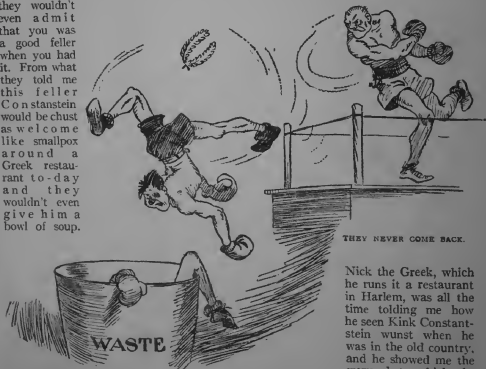
But I am speaking of fellers which they really got foolish and ain't got nothing left like an ex-champeen box fighter. The other night I was at a box fighting, and Bettling Nelson, which he used to be champeen box fighter, tries to climb into the rink so that he would be introductioned. But a cop chased him out of the place. Wunst everybody wanted to be introductioned to Bettling Nelson, but when he is an ex-champeen nobody would want to talk to him at all.

Maybe the reason why is that when a feller becomes an ex-champeen he is going to be an ex all his life, and everybody knows it. It is different in any other business on account frinstance if I should have a rotten season and become an ex-photografer the chances is that later on I might be right back in business again.

Box fighters and kinks, they never come back. When a box fighter gets it on the chin the best he can hope for is that wunst in a while they would say: "Well, he was a good feller when he had it." And maybe that's the best which this Mr. Constantstein which he lost his kink chob could expect.

Well, I hope they will never be saying that about me. What I want them to be saying instead: "Izzy Kaplan is a good feller and he has still got it." I never want to be one of those exes, even a kink's exes.

Sometimes they wouldn't even admit that you was a good feller when you had it. From what they told me this feller Con stanstein would be chust as welcome like smallpox around a Greek restaurant to-day and they wouldn't even give him a bowl of soup.



THEY NEVER COME BACK.

Nick the Greek, which he runs it a restaurant in Harlem, was all the time telling me how he seen Kink Constantstein wunst when he was in the old country, and he showed me the wery het which he

threw it up in the air when the kink was passing by, and he never would trust no cleaning feller with that het on account he wanted to keep it in the family. It was a derby's het, but since this last business in Greece when Kink Constantstein practically went into benkrupcty, Nick the Greek is wearing a new soft het, and he told me confidential that this feller Constantstein always was a faker and never was on the level with nobody, not even himseluf.

Look at this feller Manuel, which he used to be kink from the Portugeeses. He has been out of woik so long that people is saying that he was nothing but a loafer practically all his life. I never knew no Portugeeses so I couldn't get no line on what kind of a feller he was when he had the chob. Nobody remembers nothing about him, except that he is out.

With the politicians it is the same way. The chob wouldn't last, and when it is gone it must be hard on an ex getting used to getting the gone-by. The toughest thing must be to be an ex-Senator when chust when he gets used to making it a speech all the time he couldn't get nobody to listen, excepting maybe his wife, on account she is so used to it that she could listen without hearing nothing like I would listen to advice from my old man.

Thinking about this kind of business is good to keep a feller from getting too fresh. I read that when they are getting a new kink they would holler: "The kink is dead. Long live the kink." It makes me think that some day they might be hollering: "Izzy Kaplan is failed. Three cheers for Moe Koenigsberg." Then I am nothing but an ex-photografer, nothing but a loafer chust like this feller Constantstein. Honest, I am getting sorrier for that feller every minuite.

Everybody becomes a nix when he is an ex, everybody excepting one feller, Chon L. Solomon. They are still telling how they shook it the hand that shook it the hand of Chon L. Solomon.

ADWICE TO THE LOVELORN.—Yes, Abe, marritch would cure you, but if you have seen some of the fellers that it has cured maybe you would chust as soon not be cured.—I. K.

Next week Izzy Kaplan ENVIES COLLEGE PRANKS.



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 Though she's the loveliest ever,
 Nor is it just the way she has,
 Though she's most awfully clever;
 It's not her voice, her grace, her height,
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 It's just the feeling that's out of sight,
 When I think I'm *not her brother!*

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